

Our Second Issue, and We're Already a Winner (See Page 2)

ABORIGINAL SF

Tales Of the Human Kind

Dec. 1986/\$2.50



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About Our Cover

Except for the first issue, we do not assign covers. Instead we choose artists to illustrate stories and then pick the best illustration for the cover (which is not always as easy as it might seem). Our cover this issue was done by Carl Lundgren for George Zebrowski's story, *Bridge of Silence*. Carl is better known for his fantasy and fine art work, but as the cover shows, he is equally adept at science fiction illustrations. We were delighted with the outcome and immediately selected it for the cover of our second issue. The fans at Con-Federation, the 1986 Worldcon, apparently agreed. They selected it as the "Best science fiction illustration" in the con art show. So here we are, our second issue and already an award winner thanks to Carl and George, whose story inspired Carl's brushstrokes. Stick around ... there's more to come.



A Message From

Our Alien Publisher



A Peculiar Habit Called 'Humor'

I must confess that I often regret being the investigator assigned to Earth. I do not know if you have even received my previous report. I do not know if you will receive this one. Since the diode was injured, I am marooned here with no hope of interactive communication. Surrounded by human beings, I despair of seeing civilization again. I file my reports on schedule (the diode valiantly sends them, but I can receive nothing in return), and I duplicate them as highly compressed teletexts attached to network television broadcasts. I know you monitor all radio signals when they arrive (34 years after they are sent), and I full hope that these reports are getting through is the one thing that keeps me going in my assignment. I hope that my certificate will be conferred, even if it is *in absentia*.

Grow Up!

This expression invariably elicits from human beings a series of short barks, which they refer to as "laughter." At least it does when it is spoken by a human being known as Joan Rivers. I had hoped you would be able to see this particular human being when I decided to disguise this report as a blip on the broadcast signal identified as *The Tonight Show*, but Rivers no longer belongs to that broadcast signal. In fact, she has been given a broadcast signal of her own and it may feature a great deal of this human barking.

As to what causes the laughter when Rivers says "grow up," it has to do with a peculiar human institution called "humor." Human beings regard the injunction to grow up as "funny," by which they mean they enjoy hearing it and it makes them lose a small amount of control over their breathing and vocalization. It is all very puzzling. Human beings, you see, require 60 to 70 of their years to grow up, and some of them—even among those of very advanced age—could be said never to have made it past adolescence at all. Those of you who attain full maturity in the course of two years must find it incomprehensible that they would enjoy being reminded of the fact.

They have a similar reaction to being told they look marvelous. I don't understand this reaction, either; none of them looks marvelous. They are all as inconspicuous as I. But you can tell that from their appearance in the broadcast signals.

The Origins Of Humor

It is much the same with all their humor. To appreciate the humor you will be monitoring on these broadcast signals, you must understand the nature of human sex and sexual activity. There are many varieties of humor, but the humor of the broadcast signals centers chiefly on sexual themes.

Sex is a major preoccupation with human beings, and since it is in their nature to pursue it with an unseemly lack of periodicity, A human female needs only a certain

set of conditions (having to do with the surroundings (and the weather) and the circumstances (having to do with her current state of mind and the proximity of male human beings) in order to vigorously seek sexual union. A human male, on the other hand, enthusiastically pursues sexual activity under any conditions and circumstances and with any human female.

This slight incongruity in the sexual natures of human males and females provides the inspiration for much of their literature, drama, music, visual arts, dance, and plumbing. Far from regarding this incongruity as a problem, all human beings consider it humorous. There are exceptions, to be sure, but the inability to be amused by it is thought by them to be a reliable sign of pathology.

You can obtain an amused reaction from a human being by telling almost any story that confirms their sexual natures. Surprisingly, however, you can obtain an amused reaction by telling a story that *beats* them. It is funny to human beings when females seek sex, it is funny when they don't. It is funny when males seek females, and it is funny when they seek other males.

And the most reliable source of human laughter, barring none, is when a human male dons the costume of a human female. Since the invention of television (and perhaps for a lot longer than that), human males have been putting on dresses under the gaze of the rest of humanity. This activity is portrayed on their broadcast signals about a hundred times in an Earth

year, and then it is portrayed another hundred times in the reruns.

This should be enough information to give you a good understanding of the humor in the broadcast signals. I will try to deal with the humor in other media in subsequent reports, but for now, you should have the basis for interpreting television. If you understand the fundamental incongruity of human sexual nature and faithfully monitor the broadcasts, then eventually you will be tempted to bark right along with the human beings. In case you have difficulty finding the humor, however, there are cues. The producers of human television, sensing that there is nothing intrin-

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EDITOR'S NOTES

By Charles C. Ryan

More Stories This Time

Other Tidbits

Since our last issue, your editor had the good fortune to attend the 15th anniversary celebration of Walt Disney World in Florida.

I've been to many extravaganzas in my time, but Disney World's bash outdid them all.

In a weekend jammed full of parades, parties and entertainment, I was able to catch a showing of *Captain EO*, a 3-D musical space video starring Michael Jackson (See color photos on Page 8) which will only be shown at the two Disney theme parks.

The 17-minute 70mm film was produced by George Lucas of *Star Wars* fame and Francis Ford Coppola and has all the special effects you might expect from such a combo. But in a way, it attempts too much and ends up with a number of blurry 3-D images even though there are several effects which leap out from the screen.

If the 3-D technique had been used more sparingly, it would have made it much more effective but even at that the film doesn't rise above the level of a music video.

The science-fictional, or space-fantasy elements are more window dressing than backbone. As long as you realize you aren't going to see a science fiction epic, the film can be fun—at least judging by the reactions of those in the theater with me. And of course there are those who see Michael Jackson fans...

-ABO-

Welcome to the second issue of *Aboriginal SF (ABO)*. For those of you who are just joining us, I'm not about to re-explain why we have a crazy alien publisher (above) or where we came up with the name *Aboriginal SF*. You'll just have to get a copy of the first issue to find out.

We're still receiving letters on that first issue and three of the principal questions are:

Why a tabloid format?

Are you really going to keep this size?

Will you have more stories?

One amusing side note is that the two primary SF news publications, *Locust and Science Fiction Chronicle*, both recently commented on our use of "newsprint" as a paper stock. *ABO* is printed on a 56-pound white offset stock. It is a paper some book publishers use and it is a better and more expensive stock than the paper normally used by either of those news publications. We chose the 56-pound stock because it allows the best four-color reproduction at our printers.

Better reproduction is also why we chose a tabloid format. If we had chosen to publish *ABO* as a digest like other SF magazines, even our four-color art would be no bigger than 5 by 7 inches—almost too small to bother with color.

We'll stick with the tabloid format. That's up to you, our readers.

We intend to poll you on that and a number of other things. You'll

get to vote whether we stay with our 11½ by 17 inch tabloid format, or whether we switch to a 8½ by 11 inch magazine size. We won't go digest size.

We think that after several issues of seeing big, colorful illustrations, you won't want a change, but we're flexible.

Will we have more stories? We already do.

This issue has 32 pages and six stories, eight more pages than the first issue and two more stories, including an account of how we "met" our alien publisher. (Pity the poor writer we saddled with that assignment.)

This is also the place where we have to fess up our boob-boosts. Needless to say, a house is not a home and the name of the fourth in this format, *four-color*, is *The Voyage Home*. A few other types also crept in as we rushed to our self-imposed deadline to get the first issue out in time for Con-Federation, the 1986 world science fiction convention, as we had announced.

Any further growth in size will be dependent on advertising. For every three to four pages of advertising we get, we can add another four to five pages of fiction or art.

Will we ever have more than eight pages of color? Yes. But again, that depends on whether we get color advertising or not. Even in this format, four-color reproduction is the most expensive part of the operation. But we think it's worth it.

Boomerangs

Comments From Our Readers



Dear Mr. Ryan:

When I found your publication in my post box, my first reaction was, HOW DID THIS JUNK MAIL GET IN HERE!!! I HATE NEWSPAPERS. THEY GET INK ALL OVER MY....What? No ink all over. Nice paper, too. Not the kind of cuddly little magazine I usually curl up with on the porch swing, but at least...well, but it's got COLORED PICTURES. What is this, the *Playboy* of SF publications? Or does the editor have the impression that if readers NEED colored pictures in order to interpret the text.

But when I got past the INCONVENIENT FORMAT and the INSULTING PIX and into the no-smear printed matter, there was pure delight: — humor — fantasy — likable persons — inventiveness — questionable taste. The questionable taste is your assumption that the alien publisher is crazy. Maybe the alien thinks the same of you, but is too polite to mention it. Let us have a little diplomacy here. Do we go around calling fellow earthpersons of diplomatic importance crazy in print? Um...never mind. I think I'm arguing myself into a corner here.

Tell you what. Just enter my subscription. I thoughtfully approved of your project and want to read more.

Bemusedly,

M. Hazen, Ohio

(The nice paper is a 50-lb., white offset stock — Ed.)

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Maybe you can help me. I have written to several people, but they either don't understand, or don't believe me. When I wrote to Sagan, he referred me to Asimov. Asimov sent me a rejection slip. I read your first issue of *Aboriginal SF*, and you seem to be open minded.

The problem is my friend, Ferdie. He's an alien. He ran away from home a while back, and is staying with me. It's a long story. About a year ago, Ferdie got hooked on the Styrofoam packing peanuts ("ghost turds") that I sometimes bring home from work. His habit became so bad that all he did was sit around stoned all day, and watch The Disney Channel. (That's how I started writing to people for advice.)

A friend of mine suggested I get Ferdie off Styrofoam by getting him on rubber bands, which are less addictive. That actually worked for a while. Ferdie had plenty of energy, and the house has never been cleaner.

But that didn't last. Ferdie got so dependent on elastic, he even ate my underwear. Then he began nunching on ghost turds again. Now, the problem really starts. Ferdie has gotten religion! I don't know how he gets in touch with these weirdos, but the Hm'na-na has really got this situation.

Ferdie is getting ready to go on a pilgrimage to Zeta Reticuli, and I am afraid of what might happen. From what I've heard, these people are like Moonies and Ferdie is in line to inherit the majority of his Arch-families' holdings, including powerful political position. I have GOT to contact Ferdie's Arch-families and let them know what is going on. If Ferdie converts to

Hm'na-na, it could be a disaster. Do you have any suggestions?

Sincerely,

Danger Zone, Texas

(Yes, the name is for real.)

(We have these therapy sessions...you're welcome to join. The real alien's moved to Miami. — Ed.)

Dear Boomerang,

Catch!

(Well, maybe after reading this it should be — Duck!).

Sorry I couldn't find a decent crayon and found the lined paper — I have this fetish about neatness when it comes to sentences running uphill and down.

However — congrats on your first issue. Pick one of the following:

(A.) It was just dandy.

(B.) Far out, really far out.

(C.) Huh?

(D.) I'd rather read the dictionary.

But for real —

The paper choice is terrific, love your margins, size is swell, colors boffo, stories stupendous and the artwork...well, lets cut this short...take me I'm yours!

Sincerely,

Lillian McManus, New Jersey

Dear Mr. Ryan:

Today in my mail I received a special introductory copy of your publication.

At first, I was excited. "WOW!" I thought. "What a great thing to get in the mail!"

Then, thumbing through the pages, I ran into the enclosed book review by Darrell Schweitzer on *The Invaders Plan*. I was absolutely appalled, not to mention insulted.

Having read *The Invaders Plan* as well as the three subsequent volumes in the "dekalogy," I can only imagine that Mr. Schweitzer is either abusively insulting to everyone or is merely a rock in the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean with no tongue to put in his proverbial cheek. Or perhaps he is one of the "psychologists" that Hubbard refers throughout the series and is afraid that people will see him for what he truly is.

According to Mr. Schweitzer, I have the intelligence of a moron since I (an avid sci-fi reader for many years) enjoy Hubbard's humor and satire. In fact in the fifteen plus years I have been enjoying many genres of science fiction, I can honestly say that the style which Hubbard employs in the *Mission Earth* series is refreshing. It portrays truths about our society by overemphasizing them. After all, who is the definition of a moron?

Had I been foolish enough to have read Schweitzer's review of *The Invaders Plan* before I had delved into the book myself, I would have missed an experience the likes of which I have never experienced in my previous reading of science fiction.

Respectfully,

Carol Lee Chamberlain, Texas

Dear Sirs,

Enclosed please find a check for my subscription in the amount of \$22 for 12 issues of *Aboriginal SF*.

I must complement you on the excellent of your first offering. I was particularly impressed with your stand on L. Ron Hubbard. So many of the SF community seem dedicated to the myths of his skill at writing. I think, like you, that the addition of color was a big plus. "The Phoenix Riddle" (By John A. Taylor) was very well written and enjoyable. The only article with limited appeal for me was "The Home System." It dragged a lot.

Sincerely,

Paul Jackson

New Jersey

p.s. I would like information about submissions: length, spacing, presentation by, etc. Would you oblige by return mail?

(Manuscript submission information is located on the contents page. If you would like the writer's guidelines, please send a self-addressed stamped envelope — Ed.)

Dear *Aboriginal SF*:

I have read your first issue and enjoyed it, especially the gossip column and book reviews. Your stories were on the whole entertaining and well-written, especially the one by Orson Scott Card. But I must make one criticism which you will probably find trivial. Two of the stories feature something which has become my private crusade to alert people about. Namely, the female characters in two of the four stories have red hair. Now you would say, so what? I have made a survey and I find that almost all the main or best supporting characters in science fiction have red hair! Well, not all, but at least a commanding percentage. Check it out for yourself. Why is this? I believe that it is an automatic feature of writing to give your main character red (or blonde) hair. Editors and writers, who are word-oriented people and not color or picture-oriented, probably never notice it. But the red hair has become a universal shorthand for indicating something about a character: This character is brilliant, gifted, exciting, has extra powers, and is sexy and attractive. All with one piece of appearance information.

I have written an article about this, which I am enclosing here. This article was printed in the now-defunct *Science Fiction Review*. You can reprint it if you want. I would like everyone who reads it, whether author, editor, or publisher, to become aware of the color stereotyping in the texts they print.

By the way, I dye my hair red so that all of the aforementioned qualities will become mine.

I am enclosing my check for a year's subscription to *Aboriginal SF*.

Colorfully yours,

Hannah M.G. Shapero, Massachusetts

(Do you have any dye left? — Ed.)

Boomerangs:

Just got your magazine. To sum up my feelings about it I have chosen some very choice words: Super, Fantastic, Spectacular, Stupendous, Magnificent, Great. And its even good! Here's my subscription check for 18 issues (\$30.00).

Outworldishly yours,

Scott W. Shippee, Rhode Island

(What can we say? There aren't any adjectives left — Ed.)

Dear Abos:

You got me. I haven't had this much fun with an SF publication in ages! One of my current subscriptions will go unrenowned so I can keep getting *Aboriginal SF*. Keep up the good work!

Truly,

Eileen Ribbler, Ohio

Hello and Bravo!

I wish you success in this endeavor. Just through a bond or two from Harlan Ellison and some crumbs now and then from my No. 1 love Kurt Vonnegut and I'll be a devoted subscriber.

Sincerely,

P. Regep, Massachusetts

P.S. Kiss the Celtics for me. I'm from Sturbridge, Mass.

(Larry Bird would bop me one if I kissed him. — Ed.)

Dear Alien Ryan & Co.:

The first issue of *ABO* is great! Visually impressive, an original format, and the stories.

All the fiction was good, and "Sight Unseen," John Moore's high-tech crime yarn and "Prior Restraint," Orson Scott Card's time-travel censorship story was so powerful I wanted to fire-bomb a 7-Eleven — or something! My only complaint is that there were only four stories! But maybe there'll be room for more fiction in future issues.

The alien publisher gag could get old after a while, but it could be fun if handled right. In fact, it's that feeling of fun and sense of play that makes me like *ABO*. What a relief after all the stuffiness in or over the last several years — I'm tired of editors who don't use humor because they don't think their readers are interested in laughter (talk about aliens!) I want to see how wild and crazy you get, the wilder and crazier, the better!

As soon as I grab some spare cash, I'll extend my subscription. Sooner than that I'll send more stories.

Best of luck in generating Excitement and Fun.

Ernestly,

Ernest Hogan, California

(More stories already. How's that for action? — Ed.)

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Surprising Tales, Growing Success

The tales in this issue are full of surprises. Far less unexpected is the growing success of their authors and illustrators.



Photo by Jay Kay Klein

George Zebrowski

George Zebrowski gives us a chilling encounter with an alien life form in "Bridge of Silence." Zebrowski, who writes full time in scenic upstate New York has been a name to reckon with in SF literature since the early 1970s when he wrote a number of short stories, one of which, "Heaven, God" was chosen as a finalist for the 1972 Nebula Awards.

He is author of the novel, *Macrolife*, which Arthur C. Clarke called "so good it doesn't need a recommendation from me."

He has just finished editing the anthology *Nebula Awards 21*.

Zebrowski's troubled spaceman was the inspiration for Carl Lundgren's award-winning cover illustration.

Lundgren has worked for the art directors of literally dozens of publishers and won many awards. He was nominated for a Hugo award in 1982.

In a biography printed with his first limited edition portfolio, "Seasons of Wizardry," Lundgren is described as "not the kind of artist who has been drawing and painting since the age of three. Carl was 17 years old before he even picked up a paintbrush and has been trying to make up for the lost time ever since."

He is now teaching advanced illustration at the Philadelphia College of Art and mostly concentrating on fine arts. He had two paintings hanging in the Delaware Art Museum with a National Academy of Fantastic Art Exhibit through November.

For Lundgren, art is also a family affair. Wife Michele has just become coordinator of the gallery shop and special events for the Abington Art Center in Jenkintown, Penn.

And daughter Cara, 16,

received an award of excellence and \$100 as the only Philadelphia winner of the Scholastic Art Award contest.



Elizabeth Anne Hull

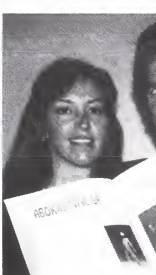
Elizabeth Anne Hull's tale of devoted companion also raises the prospect of future family planning dealing the decisive blow in the age-old battle of the sexes.

Hull is an associate professor at William Rainey Harper College in Palatine Illinois and counts the short story, "The Matter of the Milder," and poem "1984 in 1983" among her SF works.

She and husband, Frederik Pohl, recently co-edited *Tales From the Planet Earth* (Tor Books) due out before the holidays. The 19 chapters written by diverse authors are organized around the single theme of human beings and aliens co-existing in one body.

When she's not writing or editing, Hull (Betty to her friends), can sometimes be found doing crossword puzzles.

Val Lahey Lindahn, the artist for "Second Best Friend," offers this description of her career and interests:



Val Lahey Lindahn & Ron Lindahn

Her career as an illustrator began in 1971 with a series of anatomically correct scratchings on a mens room wall. Insistence on signing her work led to a contact with Dugent Publishing, and a number of editorial illustrations based on themes explored earlier on the wall.

As reality began to close in around her, she turned to science fiction in order to retain a modicum of sanity. For years she honed her craft specializing in black and white interiors. She chose B&W for two very important reasons, she couldn't afford color paint and no one would send her color assignments.

The result is that she has twice been nominated for a Hugo with only a few color science fiction or fantasy covers ever published. In the commercial field the work that Val and Ron Lindahn have produced for movie posters and packaging have brought them national recognition.

Val Lahey Lindahn loves to pick her models from friends or occasionally right off the street. She builds models, props and costumes as well as sculpting aliens for her paintings. She is strongly influenced by Wyeth, Parrish, Pyle, Vermeer, Medick, her brother, John Lahey, and her husband, Ron.

She is inspired by Ray Bradbury and by her mother, who still calls every day. She hates to illustrate sharks, lung cancer, elves, spray cans and the chemical changes in the brain. She also hates clients who don't pay, excessive changes, her period and her driveway.

She lives in Rabun Gap, Georgia.

In "Regeneration,"



Rory Harper

Rory Harper has come up with a novel form of therapy for a nasty problem society is just starting to bring out into the open.

Harper lives in Houston and works full time in a lab for an oil company when he's not writing.

He's finishing his first novel, which promises to open up a whole new subgenre: oil-field science fiction.

Harper likes to relax by playing the blues on his guitar.

Ron Lindahn, artist for "Regeneration," offers these tidbits about himself.

He spent 11 years working for a Fortune 500 company, first as a draughtsman, then photographer and finally film maker and video producer. At age 30 he retired to become a Sky Pilot. Five years later he met Val Lahey and retired from retirement to work with her.

He began to learn his craft under the tutelage of Val, first on the bathroom walls, then he painted the entire house and finally he decided to go public. Husband and wife work closely together on most assignments, often taking turns on the same illustration.

Ron loves lying in the sun down by the Chattahoochee River, playing with Val's boy, Sean, design and working very late. He is inspired by Val, Sean, Parrish, Wyeth, Pyle, Rockwell and Fred Wiazard.

Ron hates early phone calls, cars that won't start, committees, soap operas and peanut butter.



Joel H. Sherman

If something is just too horrible to contemplate, you can be sure a science fiction author will eventually write about it. Joel Henry Sherman gives us one such alarming glimpse in "Finder's Fee."

A business insurance salesman by day, Sherman has written several short stories and has just sold his first novel to Del Rey. It's due out in the Spring of 1988, and the working title is *Corpseman*.

The photo of Sherman was taken at a legendary site in Chohame, Calif., not far from his town of Bakersfield.

Give up, trivia buffs? It's the very spot where James Dean died.

For hobbies, Sherman is fond of backpacking, reading, and midget wrestling(?).



Ken Macklin

Ken Macklin, artist for "Finder's Fee," splits his time between painting and selling SF and fantasy art, doing comic book work for *Marvel* and *Eclipse* comics, and working with computer graphics in the games division of *Lucasfilms*.

Ken's lived all his life in the San Francisco area. He's been a full-time artist for the last seven years and he is married to artist, Lela Dowling.

He is frequently a guest of honor at SF conventions, where he sells his fine art paintings.

Greg Cox claims to be a phlebotomist, but says he actually makes his income draining blood from street

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Art by Carl Lundgren

Bridge of Silence

By George Zebrowski

"If the decades and the centuries pass with no indication that there is intelligent life elsewhere in the universe, the long-term effects on human philosophy will be profound, and may be disastrous. Better to have neighbors we don't like than to be utterly alone."

— Arthur C. Clarke

1

The alien walked into the room with the fragile nobility of a drunk trailing invisible

robes. Gaddis leaned forward as the stick figure sat down in front of him on the floor. It was easy to imagine wisdom in those circular, watery eyes, despite their steel-gray gaze. He searched the other's face, as if at any moment it would become possible to peer inside the gaunt, black skull.

The white patch on the alien's chest gave him a certain air of friendliness, suggesting a man in an old fashioned dinner jacket, about to discourse over coffee; but the torso did not seem to breathe.

Gaddis tensed as white light flashed in the high windows. A year had not acclimated him to the planet's nervous displays. He stared at the alien's forehead. What would it be like to see through those eyes? What did the other feel? Was it a he or a she, or something else? How could he expect answers? It was hard enough for people to know one another, or themselves.

Gaddis resented the layered, Troy-like accretion that was the human mind, where archaic impulses raged through a million-year old maze,

(Continued to next page)

(Continued from previous page)

fleeing from the lamp of reason. Was it the same for the alien?

The light faded from the high windows. He thought of the jagged peaks beyond the compound and longed for Earth's soft contours.

A year gone.

It seemed longer since he had come to this small, desolate world circling the nearly invisible red dwarf star one light year beyond Pluto. The alien seemed to have been waiting, as if he were a gatekeeper, or a jailer. By what right was he here? Because aliens could do things that humanity could not; everyone knew that.

He had gone out sleeping in a torchship, but the new drive would be ready by the time he got back from his reconnaissance. The wandering star would be perfect for the first short test hops, before the new ships jumped out into the galaxy.

Every day Gaddis left his ship to confront the alien, to try to say or do something that might be understood.

"If I touch you, will you pull away?" he asked, wondering what he was revealing about humankind that should better stay hidden.

The eyes stared; the four-fingered hands rested on the ceramic floor, waiting. The alien seemed very tired at times.

Gaddis made a show of taking a deep breath. Then he touched the alien's bony extremity. The roughness of the bark-like hand reminded him of the witch's hand from his childhood nightmares.

The other drew his hand away, just out of reach. Gaddis always expected the limbs to creak, but the alien's motion was smooth.

Gaddis sniffed the air. "Jeze!" He both breathe oxygen. That should count for something!" He clapped his hands and hooted. The other's head turned slightly, and the white eyelids came down halfway.

Maybe he's mocking me, Gaddis thought, even though he knew that human intuition was almost certainly blind to the alien's body language.

Gaddis gazed into the large eyes, communing across the stillness. He had played this game with various girls at summer camp, gaining utter devotion as often as contempt, but the alien seemed immune.

Gaddis stared at the other's bony knees. They were together and tucked under, as usual.

"Are you anything like us?" Gaddis asked stupidly. "Or are you one of those who can never be reached?"

The eyes closed as he spoke, then opened slowly. Sylvia had been the same. He could argue for half an hour or more and fail to break her stubborn silence, until he was ready to run through a wall.

"If you're really advanced," Gaddis said bitterly, "you'd read my mind and take me off the hook." He laughed loudly. The frustration was claustrophobic. He was locked tightly inside his human skull. Ship and spaceship enabled him to leave his evolutionary niche, but he had not escaped its limits, despite the dry air that he shared with the alien.

By what signs could a mind be read? Was there a universal language of telepathy? Of course not; mind-reading simply moved the problem of communication back one step. Only researchers who were already in touch, who were the same in their natural history, could reach into another.

Gaddis rose and walked around the alien. There was no reason to think that fear, joy, sadness, or even curiosity, were common in the universe.

"How about this?" he asked as he knelt behind the alien and began to knead the hard, stringy flesh of the other's shoulders. "More fun than the math and logic problems I showed you at Christmas, huh?" The alien sat still, accepting. "Are you as tired as I am?" This should help. He was in contact with you, kind of a sort." He pressed with his thumbs, seeking reaction. "Tell me, was it planned for us to confront each other here? Are we to form suspicions and feel kinship grow, free from the errors of language?" Lorenz had lived with geese for decades and claimed to understand them. Skinner had insisted that given time he could even condition pigeons to read. Gaddis had known a professor who had observed his cat making decisions.

Gaddis's palms were red from the alien's roughness. Perhaps this was not a biological creature at all, he thought as he stared at the neck, but only an interesting caricature, made to keep upstart races in their solar cradles. Advanced galactic races had long ago abandoned

flesh for more permanent forms.

"Couldn't you ask something of me, tell me to rub a bit to the left or right? It would be such a small thing."

His came around again and sat down in front of the alien.

"Our problem is that we take each other for granted."

He looked around at the room's soft angles. Heat had shaped the chamber. He thought of bees. Was something observing them? Perhaps watching this impasse was the way to real contact? Only another can see the back of your neck. Four or five observers can therefore sit in a chain and achieve a measure of objectivity—about their necks. Deathless humor from Earth, he thought, where they have the arrogance to name other people's sins after themselves.

The alien blinked, got up, and left the room. Gaddis held up his sweat, reddening hands. Poisoned, he thought, dead by morning. He saw himself on a spit, turning in silence over the flames, while the aliens sat around a table, waiting...

Now sleep, he told himself as he got up and walked through the portal into the hallway. He looked both ways down the tubular passage, then picked up his spacesuit from the floor and began putting it on, checking for rips.

The red sun was a cloud-wrapped wound looming over the ragged mountains as he stepped through the ghostly lens of the force-locked and plodded across the sandy plain toward the ship. The dying star never rose higher; the tide-locked planet always faced the bloody stain in the sky.

Discovery, Gaddis told himself as he dragged one foot past the other, cannot be approached timidly. New experiences must be sought in the extremes of space-time, then measured and organized to produce knowledge. That was why he was here. The ageless child in him had long ago decided that it would see alien worlds circling farstars.

He awoke in a sweat and stared at the alien compound on the screen

Earth had hung nearby, half in darkness, at the start of his journey. He had gazed at the planet, its undulating peaks and swaying in their mazes, suburban gardens and towns. I'm not one of you, he had thought. The lights of nightshade had seemed crude, pitiable torches thrown up against the great sophisticated darkness, brightening infinitesimal interiors. He had looked away, across clear space at the cleansing sun, and its brightness had flooded his brain, illuminating the skull-darkness of a million-year-old maze, driving the lurking beasts into the black hole at the back of his mind.

Isolation and strangeness were opening up all the weaknesses within him. Despite the fragile bridge that he and the alien were building between them, the other seemed as silent as the stars had been to a century of listening radio telescopes. Scientific inquiry, so full of humble pride over its beggars tools of experiment and critical doubt, seemed to illuminate only an endless cosmic strip-tease. It was too tiring to exist as a mystery wrapped in an enigma, to learn and never be filled, hungering, to know that intimate voices were calling from alien interiors and not be able to answer.

He stopped for a moment and searched out Earth's sun among the poisonous clouds. One of the reasons he had gone into space was to get a clear view of his world. There it was, an unimpressive yellow spark. He would have preferred to have come from Vega or Sirius.

Black clouds drifted across the red blotch. Light flashed within them. There was a flurry of ammonia now as he came up to the tall egg-shape of the torchship and climbed the ladder.

The lock slid open and he stepped inside. He felt more secure as it cycled and he was able to take off his suit. He went through the inner door as it opened and climbed the ladder to his sleep alcove in the control room. He could have kept a sleeping bag in the compound, but the thought of being unconscious with the alien nearby was too disturbing.

The alien installation was a cluster of dark mounds on the ceiling screen. He worried about the problem of psychological overlap with the alien's physiology. The other was humanoid,

and an apparent oxygen breather. There had to be some psychological overlap.

"Don't count on it," he told himself in a whisper. He had talked to himself more than once recently, just to hear a human voice.

He closed his eyes. The senses are a deep well, he thought, the mind a watery mirror at the bottom, dimly reflecting the universe. We hold a measurable angle of reality within ourselves, reduced to a shadow in the brain's gray theater. The alien seems like me, but his nervous system enacts a different image of the cosmos. We meet at the opposite ends of a bridge of silence.

Gaddis had never seen any sign of the alien's ship. Sometimes he dreamed that the other had been hatched inside the mounds.

A glowing window opened in the alien's forehead.

Light speared the darkness.

Gaddis swam up through the beam to the black head and peered into the alien interior.

Thoughts danced inside—birds rising up and circling each other, quantum shards of light struggling to complete a mysterious puzzle. Gaddis was fascinated by the clarity of the pieces; they trembled with the promise of knowledge.

The alien's white eyelids were pressed shut. Gaddis retreated from the head, suddenly afraid.

The eyes opened and yellow beams shot out, searing Gaddis's brain.

It began to ooze out through his nose.

He awoke in a sweat and stared at the alien compound on the screen, trying to quiet the brassy music of his fears, resisting the vast, cavernous regions of sleep as the seashore whisper of the air system grew louder. Finally, his will whored with his unconscious; his rational censor retreated behind a wall and he screamed without being able to wake up.

Sometimes Gaddis saw the expression and posture of an orangutan in the alien, recalling an old school acquaintance he had particularly despised. At other times the alien took on the demeanor of one chubby administrator with beady black eyes. Gaddis had never been a fan of the man, but the more he thought about him had been overjoyed to hear that the man had developed a chronic disease.

Maybe there were other aliens in the compound, Gaddis thought one day as he examined himself in his bathroom mirror. A gaunt face stared back at him, resembling the alien. Gaddis swallowed as his throat became dry. I've been here too long, he thought, wondering if he should continue to wait for the message he had sent home after landing. He had said that he would wait for new orders; the message was too important to leave unanswered. The message had reached Earth by now, and the reply was on its way to him.

"This year," he told himself cheerfully. One of the new jumpships could outrun the message and be here in a month. It was up to him to keep learning all he could until he was relieved.

In the room—pale creature—looking, sitting—nothing to say—ship outside—touching, tiring—star nearby—coming and going—fearing, nothing to say—empty inside—nothing—

Gaddis woke up, sweating. Stupid idea. He had become the alien, with sentence fragments tearing through his brain, deflected perceptions flashing on and off, his body throbbing with odd desires.

He dismissed the delusions and climbed out of the bunk. Is that how I see him? Cool, unsympathetic, savage underneath. He probably loves the animals of his world and gives to charity. The poor devil is as confused and tired as I am and wants to go home. Maybe he had an accident, a trained brain damage and doesn't know what to do. Catastrophe, but how can I help? Gaddis recalled another school chum—a small, thin boy who could never be caught, though he didn't run far; he would simply dodge unpredictably while staying near his pursuer. It had been infuriating, to be so near and yet so far from catching him. Gaddis had been obsessed with beating him up, if he could ever get his hands on him. Sylvia's fortified silences had been nothing in comparison.

Gaddis closed his eyes and rubbed his forehead. The headache pulsed. Bursts of light

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The Notorious Independents

"Shmoozing" is a great bit of Hollywood jargon. In fact it's an art form — shmoozing is that happyface small talk you do at parties and in hallways, the idle lip-flapping you hope is ingratiating yourself to the other party without revealing anything critical. It's not a word I think of as a pejorative anymore, being more descriptive of the communication of benign bits of information. It's a way to put someone at ease until you get



Will the real King Kong please stand up?

around to the real stuff.

We'll shmooze a bit before getting to the meat of this column — a discussion of two of the film industry's busiest studios, their rise to success and how they stay Notorious Independents.

Fair Weather Friends

Los Angeles has its own calendar. While the rest of the country sweaters through August's dog days and hunkers down for the winter months, Hollywood gears up for the fall network premieres and holiday feature film releases — the time between Thanksgiving and New Year's I've come to call Turkey Season.

Films released during the holidays are largely mainstream/family-oriented pictures. This is based on the notion that everyone is hanging around the house looking for something to do, and even if Dad doesn't want to see it, Mom can make him go anyway, or, if neither of the parents want to go, the little rug rat may pitch enough of a fit that they'll at least dump him off for the matinee. The moviegoer therefore enjoys a wide selection of carefully homogeneous entertainment — you know, *Care Bears Meet Rainbow Blight*, *He-Man Masticates the Universe*, *Young Yuppies In Love*. Like that of thing.

Last year's crop — *Santa Claus: The Movie*, *The Color Purple*, *Enemy Mine*, *Young Sherlock Holmes*, to name a few — opened slowly and, with the exception of *The Color Purple*, were greeted with indifference. Most people seemed to be staying home watching *Miami Vice* and *Moonlighting*. The trend this year is a return to time-proven formats: romance, comedy and adventure. Other than *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, which Paramount

is confident will earn over \$100 million, the year's big movies are likely to be *Golden Child*, a mystery with Eddie Murphy, *Tough Guys*, a Burt Lancaster/Kirk Douglas vehicle, and *The Three Amigos*, with comedy superstars Chevy Chase, Steve Martin and Saturday Night Live's Martin Short. (Martin Short is also featured in a new Spielberg production, *Inner Space* — more about this later in the column.)

Genre titles are hen's teeth for Christmas. There are no new films that have the potential of a *Star Wars* or an *E.T.*, or a *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, a situation I find just a little discouraging. What we have instead is the promise of another lengthy television episode called *Star Trek IV*, a remake of *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, a live action version of *Spiderman* I'm sure will have all the charm and imagination of *Howard the Duck*, a couple of campy gore fests in *From Beyond* and *Underworld* (though I confess I'm looking forward to those), and, Last but not Least: *King Kong Lives*. With this line-up, staying home to watch *Moonlighting* begins to have a lot of appeal.

Is there any hope?

Maybe. I hold cautious optimism for the remake of the *Little Shop of Horrors*. Cast is Rick Moranis of *McKenzie Brothers* fame and Steve Martin in a musical version of the classic



A beautiful alien princess waits for the Zone Troopers

Curman story about Audrey, the Man-Eating Plant. The director is Muppet Man Frank Oz, and he and his cast may be just wacky enough a combination to create something uniquely outrageous.

Dino DeLaurentiis: Getting the Monkey Off His Back

But what could be more outrageous than the upcoming release of *King Kong Lives*? From — who else? — Dino DeLaurentiis. It



Woe, woe for the woolly mammoth, woe for its wild ways

turns out that King Kong did not undergo fatal deceleration trauma when he plunged from the World Trade Center. With the help of a specially designed artificial heart and a team of surgeons in scuba gear, Kong Lives. He meets a girl. They fall in love. They do what

rect. It seems the model makers had discreetly left the genitalia off all the suits and large models. When he was told it would cost another million to make the additions, DeLaurentiis reportedly replied: "A million dollars? I ain't gonna spend no million dollars on no monkey balls..."

However, DeLaurentiis was not going to let \$2 million worth of monkey suits go to waste...hence, *Kong Lives*, coming soon to a theater near you.

But who is this Guy DeLaurentiis anyway? You've undoubtedly stumbled over his name a time or two in your never-ending search for the ultimate box of popcorn. Well, let me tell you...

Dino DeLaurentiis: The Sequel

The son of an Italian pasta manufacturer, 17-year-old Dino enrolled in Rome's Centro Sperimentale Cinematografia — Italy's version of USC film school. Before producing his first film at age 20, DeLaurentiis had been an actor, an extra, an assistant direc-

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Captain Ego with Fuzzball



Art by Ken Macklin

Finder's Fee

By Joel Henry Sherman

Rafe Loffland awakened in freefall. He twisted in the webbed sleep sack, stomach spinning with the effects of weightlessness and a massive hangover. Searching his memory, he found it ended at the bar in the Oasis, lifting one drink after another in a steady progression. His present location was a mystery. Visions of conscripted labor danced in his head.

The cabin was a nightmare of white and chrome. He struggled free of the sack and propelled himself toward the wash unit. The ritual of cleansing made him feel more human. He found a white jumpsuit in the locker, large enough to accommodate his paunch and barrel chest. Dressed, he moved out into the corridor in search of answers.

Rafe found his nephew in the galley, Velcro holding him against one wall as he emptied a protein tube. Burke grinned, blue eyes sparkling, blond stubble like gold wire, teeth white and even behind his lips. "Morning, Uncle."

"Where the hell are we, Burke?" Rafe hung

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onto the doorway for stability.

"You're on the Stellar Song. Marta Kovich is captain and owner. You met last night." Burke laughed dryly. "Your timing is atrocious, Uncle. I find someone willing to take us off Kosar and you're stinking drunk."

"What's the deal?"

"Finder's fees." He took another pull on the tube. "Marta's found a crash site. Weapons transport. Worth a damn fortune." "It's been twenty years since the war," Rafe shook his head. "I doubt the fees are still collectible."

"The fees still stand. We've each got a ten-share."

"For what?" Rafe floated across the room.

"What's my part?"

"Disarming the one active weapon system." Rafe felt his nausea increase, head spinning. "What kind of weapon?"

"I don't know," Burke replied. He cocked his head, a gesture of his childhood. "But you were ordinance in the war."

"Damn it, Burke." Rafe covered his eyes, massaging his forehead. "You don't know what you're asking."

Burke moved close, breath sweet with protein paste. "For twenty years I've listened to you whine about leaving Kosar, drinking yourself into a coma every time you get a few spare credits. You'll never buy your way off the planet. I took a chance for both of us." Red flushed his pale cheeks.

"You're talking about a programmed killer. I'm not ready to die."

Burke pushed off the wall, Velcro tearing free loudly. "You've been dead for years, Uncle." He darted through the hatchway and out into the passage.

Rafe hung in the center of the room for a moment, fear and anger a tight knot in his gut. After a few minutes in the silence, he swung over to the dispensing unit and punched up a bulb of steaming coffee.

Marta Kovich radiated intensity. Rafe studied the woman in the soft illumination of the lounge. She was thin with hard muscles and wiry arms. Her hair was a dark stubble, her lips thin, face hollow and fleshless. She watched him with lustrous brown eyes, like copper coins gleaming in the twilight. The woman keyed a contact and brought a stellar map up onto the viewscreen.

"The transport is on the fourth planet." Her voice was hoarse.

Rafe nodded. "Did you land?"

"I sent two drones to investigate."

The woman touched another contact and the image changed, a closeup of the planet, atmosphere thick with murky clouds. Two clicks off the surface, the cloud cover ended, revealing a sloping plain pocked with mud flats and geyers, clumps of vegetation glinting with glittering black rock and rust colored soil. A narrow valley carved a straight line across the flats. The crater at the far end was a dimple in the endless plain, transport resting in the mud and slime at the bottom. Marta froze the picture.

"She brought me the identification numbers. I tracked down the ship." Burke rubbed one hand across his scalp. "It's the Achilles."

"We've got a manifest. If only half of it is still viable, it's worth a fortune in fees. But it's not without hazard." She advanced the film.

The ship was over a kilometer in width, its length lost in the mud. A gaping hole yawned beneath a twisted protrusion of bent steel. Twin ruts carved the mud around the opening. A rapid movement in one corner of the field of vision, camera panning to focus on the activity. Brilliant light flared. When the image burnt faded, there was only static on the viewer.

"The second drone was hit as it came over the ridge," Marta said. "I didn't have a third one to risk."

Rafe felt sick, a cold hand twisting his guts. For a second, the war returned, he was back on Meltdown, a long line of tanks advancing toward him, lasers carving the night. He heard the screams of the dying, smelted burned flesh. "Rewind it back to the shots of the Achilles," he said hoarsely.

Marta fingered the contacts. The screen flickered. The Achilles appeared in the bottom of the crater.

"Freeze it," Rafe commanded. He edged closer to the screen, examining the scars in the

soil around the puncture in the ship and muttering softly under his breath. He was clammy with sweat. "Roll it forward." The action inched toward the flash, Rafe stopping it just before the brilliance became too intense to bear. At one corner of the screen, he detected a square silhouette. "Damn."

"Know it?" Burke asked.

"Hephaestus C-47," Rafe whispered.

"Can we take it out?" Marta watched him closely.

"No." Rafe rubbed his jaw with one hand, staring at the screen. "It's forty tons of durable steel with a nuclear powerplant. His speeds of sixty clicks per hour. Carries laser and conventional cannon, incendiary tubes. Sensors accurate at fantastic ranges. Synthetic intelligence of genius levels in strategy and tactics."

"There has to be a way."

"To you, it's only a shape on a screen, a halo-projection." Rafe backed away from them. "I've seen those damn machines in action." An involuntary shudder racked him. He wanted a drink badly. "Just leave me out of this." He kicked toward the hatchway, pulling himself out into the passage, a scream building in his convulsing chest.

The galley produced generic liquor. He grabbed a bulb and lay in the darkness of his chamber, gulping the fiery liquid, feeling it burn down the length of his throat. Visions of the war swept over him, the old fear clawing at his brain.

"Uncle!" Burke swung into the hatchway, peering into the darkness. "Sorry I got you into this."

"It's not your fault." He breathed deeply.

"You're not the only one who wants off Kosar." Burke twisted, wedging himself into the hatch, feet pressing against one side, back against the other, hands gripping the top. "I'm a half-breed, the child of a prisoner of war and a Kosarian woman. No advancement. No promotions. I'm an assistant reference librarian." He could not hide the bitterness in his voice. "Can't give any responsibility to rebel genes. Never know when we might turn on the faithful." Burke swallowed hard. "I'm tired of dead ends."

Rafe sucked another swallow from the bulb. "You don't know what you're asking." He closed his eyes. "Ever had a bad nightmare, wake up sweating and shaking? You're afraid to close your eyes, because the horror is still poised at the edge of your consciousness. I've lived like that for twenty years. The war was and I was only obeying orders. But I knew right from wrong. I worked on those machines. Late in the war, I helped build them." He shook his head slowly. "You don't know what you're asking."

Burke grabbed his shoulders. "This is a chance for both of us."

"It's a chance to die."

"Are we living now?"

Rafe was silent for a long time. He shifted in the sleep web. "There might be a way," he said. "There were repair codes used to shut down the systems for overhaul."

"Do you know them?"

"No." Rafe shook his head. "But they have to be on the transport."

"We've got full schematics on the Achilles, including manifests and loading bills."

He took another sip from the bulb. "Might study them. Find some likely places to search, if I can board the Achilles. Can't promise anything."

"It's worth a try."

Rafe nodded. "Maybe." He swung out of the sleep sack and followed Burke to the bridge.

They spent two hours in the lounge, poring over the schematics for the Achilles. Rafe selected three primary locations for the codes; the ordnance quarters, the cargo deck, and the ship's repair station. Marta was silent, listening as Burke and Rafe exchanged suggestions, flipping the pages as requested.

"They could be anywhere ... but we kept them in ordnance when we traveled. I'll look there first." Rafe rubbed at his nose. "If I get on board,"

"We'll use a diversion." Marta said, her face hidden with shadow, eyes gleaming.

"What'd you have in mind?"

"Drop you out of range of its sensors." She nodded toward Burke. "We'll take the flitter and lead it away from the crash site."

"Might work." Rafe massaged his neck. "Dangerous though. Get too close, it'll take you out. C-47 doesn't miss often."

"I'll stay low, follow the southern ravines.

How much time will you need?"

Rafe shrugged. "Depends on the condition of the ship. With luck, thirty minutes. Could be pretty broken up inside. Might take longer."

Burke cleared his throat. "What about communications?"

He shook his head. "It'll be monitoring signals. Maintain radio silence unless it retreats back to the ship. Then warn me."

Marta stared at him for a long moment. "When do we go?"

"You'll need daylight for evasive flying."

"We've seventy-two hours from planetfall. Anything you need before then?" Marta switched off the display.

"A stiff drink." Rafe grinned.

"Why don't you ease off it, Uncle?" Burke did not return his smile.

"I'll sober when you see me, boy. Until then ..." he winked. "It passes the time." Rafe swung out of the hatchway and pulled himself down toward the galley.

The shuttle came down through the atmosphere at a hot angle, ripping through the clouds. Marta landed twenty clicks west of the crashsite. Rafe suited up in silence, remembering the men he'd seen burned to death on Meltdown. His skin oozed sweat. He double-checked the suit connections, awkward in the laughable armor Marta had provided, little protection against the heat on his back.

"Ready, Uncle?" Burke peered in at him from the door of the airlock.

"Yeah."

"It's headed this way," Marta hollered from the cockpit. "Better get moving. We'll draw it off before it gets too close."

He raised his helmet and settled it into place. Burke snapped the helmet connections tight. Rafe lifted his tool bag as Burke closed the hatch. He had placed a laser pistol and two pulse grenades in the bag. They were terribly inadequate. The lock cycled and he moved out into the soup.

When he was clear, the flitter roared skyward, jets kicking up a fine spray of steam and muck. The craft wagged its wings in acknowledgment of his wave, then moved off into the mud and faded from sight. It was a long time since he had felt so damned alone.

Rafe trekked across the plain in silence, ascending the gradual slope, bounding over mudpots and geysers. The gravity was less than a fifth of Earth standard. It felt good to work his muscles out on the bag on his back and the smell of salt and sweat in his helmet made the war return. He felt the old fear. He tasted bile.

The graveyard surrounded the wreckage, a semi-circle of stones arranged at the bottom of the valley. Rafe stopped at the perimeter, suddenly aware of the ordered rocks, each small square etched with a single cross, burial mounds still visible despite years of erosion. He stepped gingerly toward the cemetery toward the opening in the side of the transport, a hole opened from inside, steel and metal pushed out toward him like the petals of a rusted flower.

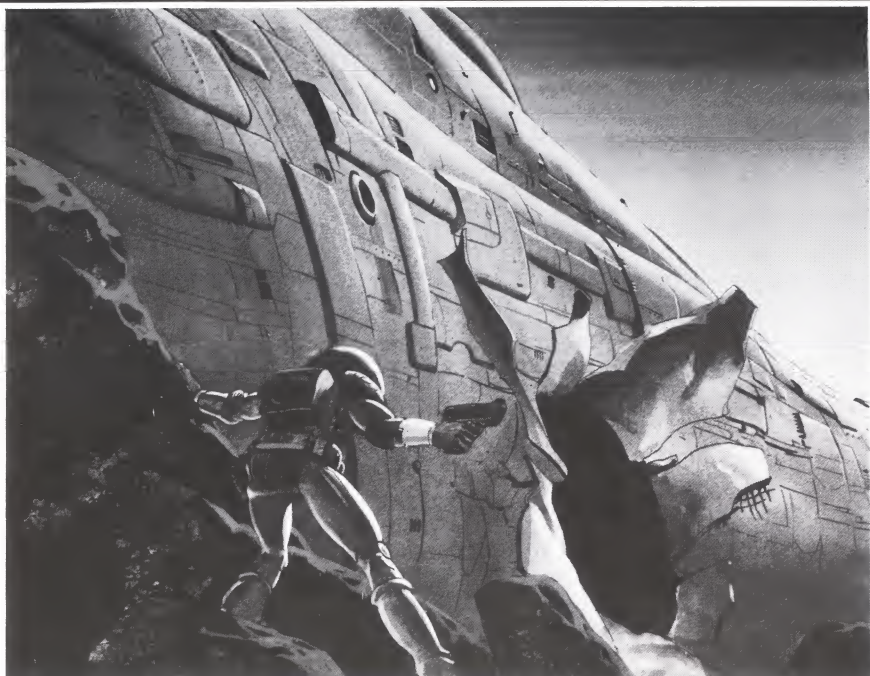
Near the ship, the rocks were larger, resting on the soil like huge gems. He examined the chunk nearest him, surface etched and fragments piled at its base. On closer inspection, the object coalesced in his brain, like an impressionist painting coming into focus. The stone had been carved into the frozen scene of a group of men, six or seven in varying postures of submission, arms up to the sky as if to lift a great weight. Their mouths were open and screaming, eyes hollow, cheeks cavernous.

Rafe moved from crouching to outcropping, examining each, discovering a gallery of bizarre sculpture, beautiful and terrifying. A chill coursed down his spine, his mouth went dry. He swallowed hard and entered the wrecked transport.

The interior was dark. Activating the spot in his belt, he panned it slowly across the interior. He was on the storage deck, where the heavy weapons had been kept. Inactive tanks were jumbled against the bulkhead, several overturned, broken free of their moorings. Beyond them, he saw troop transports and laser cannon, missile plorers and incendiary floods. He followed a wide gap in the rubble, floor scarred by years of tread passage.

In the next chamber, Rafe found a calendar. The walls were etched with lines, groups of five like the bizarre tracks of an alien bird. They were precisely carved, marked out with exact

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Art by Ken Macklin

(Continued from previous page)

measurements, covering the ceiling and angled walls. He did not even attempt to count the days.

The tank had punched holes into every chamber, leaving free passages through the supplies and equipment. The crew lounge had an operative generator. The viewscreen was playing old holos, skewed by the angle of the ship. He watched long-dead actors and actresses move through the confines of a classic script.

The ordnance section was quiet. He scanned the cabinets, opening each to search for the manuals. As he worked, Rafe felt needles of panic driving into his brain. The old memories haunted him. He remembered other tanks, his own work. He clenched his jaw to keep from screaming.

The manuals were in a lower cabinet, stored in alphabetical order. Rafe grabbed the book for the Hephæstus, checked to see that the info-chips were still present, and slipped the packet into his bag. Sweat ran in rivulets down his face. He felt puddles in his boots. He hurried from the Achilles, using the exits provided by the tank, loping through the chambers, staggering across the canted floor of the wreck.

Entering the last chamber, his headset crackled with static. As he neared the exit, he detected a voice in the hissing. Stepping out into the open, the static cleared. Burke's panicked voice echoed loudly in his helmet.

"Rafe! Do you read?"

"I'm here." He puffed with exertion, bounding across the flat and through the odd gallery of statues.

"Get the hell out! We were hit, had to break off. Couldn't reach you."

"Must have been out of range." Rafe started up the slope, feet slipping in the coppery mud. "How long ago?"

"Fifteen minutes."

"Christ!" Rafe swore.

"The damn tank must be right on top of you."

Rafe cleared the ridge and skidded to a halt. The Hephæstus was thirty meters to his left,

weapons trained on him, waldos gleaming in the light. He felt sick, breath roaring in his lungs. His head spun.

"Do you hear me, Uncle?"

"I'm caught."

"Repeat?"

Rafe expelled a slow breath, raising his hands and waiting for the searing fire. "I'm caught, damn it!"

"We're coming in."

"Stay put. No need for you to die." His voice was surprisingly calm.

"But..."

"I knew the risks," he growled. "Now stay the hell away unless I call."

The tank was motionless, watching him. Rafe kept his hands elevated, a futile gesture of surrender. He waited. Time passed slowly, a minute, then five. Finally, the machine rolled forward. He felt the ground rumble beneath his feet. The cannons kept pace with its movement, tracking his body. He watched in awe as the tank crept down the hillside, weaved between the headstones and the statues and crawled into the ship.

Rafe took a deep breath to clear his head. He stepped slowly away from the crashsite, one stride at a time, building speed until he was sprinting across the plain. When he called for a rendezvous, Burke seemed surprised to hear his voice.

The first bulb of alcohol was a warm burn in his stomach and the second was half empty before Rafe spoke. They were in the lounge, Marta clinging to the ceiling, Burke fastened onto a Velcro strip against one wall. Both watched him expectantly.

"What happened?" asked Marta.

He squeezed another mouthful from the bulb. "It let me go."

"Just ignored you?"

"No." Rafe shook his head. "I came over the ridge and it was waiting for me. I raised my arms and surrendered — old habits die hard. After a few minutes, it turned and went down into the Achilles."

"Did you get the codes?"

"Yes."

Burke grinned. "Then we made it."

"It's not right." Rafe breathed deeply. "When you see it you'll understand, but you were wrong about survivors."

Marta arched one eyebrow. "You found people?"

"The tank survived."

"It's a machine."

Rafe rubbed a hand over his face. His muscles twitched, his hands still shaking. "I don't know." He closed his eyes. "At the end of the war, when supplies and credit got tight, we cut corners." He glanced at each of them, checking for understanding. "Chemical intelligence was expensive and scarce. The Authority had severed our supply lines." He swallowed hard. "Sometimes we didn't use chemicals."

"What then?" Burke licked his lips.

"Prisoners were expensive to keep." Rafe took another drink. "It solved both problems."

Marta looked ill. "Human intelligence?"

"They were wiped clean and reprogrammed."

"What the hell are you saying?" Burke stared at him.

"I don't think the tank has chemical intelligence."

The woman swung closer. "But it was wiped clean..."

"Maybe the wipe wasn't completed, a partial job." Rafe shrugged. "What I saw down there ... the graveyard, the statues, the holo room and the calendar, a machine wouldn't do that. A machine would not have let me go." He stared at them. "Do you understand?"

They were all silent for a time.

"So what do we do?" Burke asked finally.

"We put it out of its misery." Marta pursed her lips.

"Do we?" Rafe finished the bulb and swung over to get another. "I wonder." He took the drink and headed for his chambers.

They went down at first light, two suited gips.

(Continued to next page)

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ures struggling across the ruddy plain. Rafe carried the code transmitter, a heavy weight against his leg, like the pounding of a gavel slamming against his thigh. Burke was sweating, his porcelain features covered with a fine sheen.

The Hephaestus waited at the top of the crater, durallloy steel gleaming dully in the light. Mud and slime caked the treads. The forward waldos were held in a posture of prayer, side waldos curled against the armor plate. Shadows cast by the laser cannon and incendiary tubes stretched across the platform.

Rafe raised the code transmitter. Fear and guilt mingled with his hangover. His mouth was dry. He swallowed weakly and touched the contacts, watching the code sequence flicker across the display, numbers etched in ruby red. There was a thirty-second pause, as if the machine were debating its options. When the verification sequence came back to the transmitter, Rafe let his breath out in a thin whistle.

"That's it."

Burke was sickly pale behind his helmet. "You sure?"

"One way to find out." He stepped forward, up the gradual slope to where the tank waited. The weapons remained silent as he placed his hand on the side, clearing away the mud and debris from the ladder fixed to the armor. Hefting his tools, he levered his body up onto the back of the tank. His suit smelled of sweat and copper, fear and moisture. His feet slipped in patches of scabrous moss.

"Call her ahead," he whispered into the intercom. "It's done."

Rafe listened absently as Burke called the shuttle down. He released the pressure locks on the access plate. The plate slid open, revealing a maze of silicon chips and integrated circuitry, copper and plastic. He switched on his helmet spot and angled the beam into the interior.

Below the layers of circuit boards, arrayed like dominoes on edge, Rafe should have seen a series of steel canisters, biochemical intelligence sealed in cylindrical containers. Instead, he saw the rigid outlines of a transparent sphere, probes penetrating like steel spines, gray matter gleaming, veins pulsing across the surface of a human brain.

Breathing deeply to combat his nausea, he closed the access and backed away, jumping down the ladder. He could not clear the image from his mind.

"You all right, Uncle?"

He nodded. The shuttle spiraled in from over the horizon. "Let's start loading up." Rafe moved down the slope toward the ship.

The initial elation eroded into backbreaking labor. It took two days to transfer the equipment from the Achilles. The work was strenuous, using lasers to carve new entries into the hull, bringing the weapons out through the holes, carrying them through the graveyard and between the statues.

When the task was completed, Rafe felt only relief. He sat on the tread cover of the tank, resting his head against the back of his helmet, smelling two-day-old sweat and recycled air. Exhaustion seeped through him like poison, his muscles throbbing. He wanted a drink badly.

Marta came up the slope of the crater, greenish light glinting from her suit. She climbed the ladder, moving across the tank as if stepping on glass, and eased down to rest against the turret beside him. Burke paused alongside, resting his gloved hands on the armor plate. For a long time, the only sound was the surruration of their breathing whispering through the helmet intercom.

"There's room enough for it," Marta said finally.

"No." Rafe stared at the indistinct merger of dark cloud and copper soil on the horizon.

"It's a valuable weapons system." Burke sounded too tired to fight.

"Is it?" He turned to the woman.

She shrugged. "I don't know."

"Take it out of my share, if you want, but it stays here." He slapped his hand on the steel. "Taking it wouldn't be right. There's a person in here."

No one could answer him. The silence lengthened.

"Do we destroy it?" Burke punctuated his statement with a slow exhalation. "Add it to the graveyard?"

"Maybe." Rafe nodded. "The thought occurred to me."

"Can't leave it like this. Not with a person inside." Burke shuddered. "Poor bastard."

"I doubt it knows." The woman closed her eyes. "You said it was wiped."

"It wants to live." Rafe leaned forward to rest his hands on his knees. "That's the important thing. To want to live enough to survive, carve your statues and mark your days." He thought about his past twenty years on Kosar, the booze and the bitterness, and wondered just where he had left his desire to live. He felt tears on his cheeks and turned away from them.

Marta stood and stretched. She crossed to the ladder and dismounted. "Do what you have to do. We'll meet you at the rendezvous point." She did not wait for his answer.

The shuttle rose into the clouded sky and turned south. Rafe watched it fade into the distant mists. He remained motionless for a long time, back against the hard durallloy plate. Turning slowly, he opened the access plate and stared down into the tangled circuitry inside the tank.

Rafe rested on his knees. He considered the damage a grenade tossed into the open hatch would cause, explosion ripping wiring and brains free. Reaching down into his tool bag, he closed his gloved fist around one of the explosive charges. It was heavy in his hand.

He remembered prayers whispered in the trenches on Meldown, with the enemy and death only heartbeats away. Rafe thought about the last twenty years on Kosar, years defined by alcohol and despair, nightmares of the war. Glancing up, his eyes fell on the nearest statue, the men reaching up to hold the sky, their backs arched, mouths open and screaming. He smiled at their defiance. Rafe put the grenade back in his bag, closed the access and stepped down the ladder.

Twenty meters from the tank, he stopped and lifted the code transmitter. His gloved fingers were awkward on the keys as he entered the activating sequence. He waited long enough to see the tracking sensor start to pivot, a single sign of life.

"Live well, you bastard," Rafe Loffland whispered, then he turned and trotted down the plain into the gathering shadows of dusk.

-ABO-

Reader Service

Aboriginal SF will provide a means for our readers to obtain copies of books they see reviewed or advertised in the magazine. We are providing this special service because many of our readers do not live near bookstores which carry a large line of science fiction and may find it difficult to obtain copies of books they might be interested in. Please allow six to eight weeks for delivery, and please include \$0.75 for each book ordered to cover postage and handling. In this issue, the following books have been reviewed or advertised:

Interzone, The First Anthology
Edited by John Clute, Colin Greenland, and David Pringle
Rating: ☆☆☆ \$14.95

Kiteworld
By Keith Roberts
Rating: ☆☆☆ \$15.95

The Bronze King
By Sury McKee Charnas
Rating: ☆☆☆ \$12.95

Dragons and Dreams
Edited by Jane Yolen, Martin H. Greenberg, and Charles Waugh
Rating: ☆☆☆ \$12.95

Dark Gods
By T.E.D. Klein
Rating: ☆☆☆ \$3.95

Kingdom of Fear, The World of Stephen King
Edited by Tim Underwood and Chuck Miller
Rating: ☆☆☆ \$25.00

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Art by Sven Pagenbrock

Our Next Issue

The next issue of *Aboriginal SF* will feature stories by two award-winning authors. Charles L. Grant's "One Spring in Wyoming" is a chilling tale of a future in which American Indians had an opportunity to reclaim their land. Then guess what happens... In our next story involving The Home System (created by Hal Clement) Connie Willis tells a whimsical tale of love called "Circus World" in which a mind-reading dragon thinks it knows best. We will also have another story by John Moore (who appeared in our first issue) called "Trackdown," in which genetic engineering adds a twist to the "sport" of hunting. Dean Whitlock, in "Containment" delves into the disposition of decommissioned nuclear power plants. Plus as many more stories as we can fit along with our regular columnists.

A story by Frederik Pohl will lead off our fourth issue and after that we have stories by Harlan Ellison and many more. Don't miss an issue.

BOOKS

By Darrell Schweitzer

British SF 16 Years After New Wave

The New Wave Revolution in science fiction was over by 1970. I remember that distinctly. Decades have a way of rounding things off. Quite a few '60s things were clearly over in 1970. I recall being told about the 1967 World SF Convention (NyCon III in New York) in terms of "The New Wave was all they talked about." By 1970, everyone seemed to agree that the topic was old hat. The discussions went on. They still go on. But everyone continues to agree that it's definitely passé.

Nevertheless, the field is haunted by the ghost of the New Wave, even as Europe was haunted by the ghost of the Roman Empire long after Odaccer sent Romulus "the Kid" Augustus toppling into oblivion in A.D. 476. If anything, that only made the ghost livelier, because it had become possible to remember the Empire as something quite apart from what it had actually been in life. As yet, that remembered image changed again and again to suit the times.

Similarly, the historians of science fiction have never quite known what to make of the New Wave. There's a good book on the subject, *The Entropy Exhibition*, by Colin Greenland (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), but that deals only with a single aspect (Michael Moorcock's New Worlds magazine from the viewpoint of a British admirer).

Today there are people in the U.S. who refuse to believe that anyone could have defended or admired or advocated the New Wave. To them, it was mere obscurantism, the use of fancy techniques to hide the fact the writer had nothing to say, an enormous, destructive fraud. This isn't true, but it is important because it is how the New Wave is remembered. It is a significant but misleading simplification.

Another such simplification is that the New Wave "lost" in the United States but "won" in Britain. Certainly the gap between British and American SF has become a chasm since 1970. American SF returned to its technophilic roots and to clear-cut, traditional storytelling. The days of the arty "piece" (not always even called a story) which nobody understands are over. Joe Haldeman, Vernor Vinge, and George R.R. Martin might be cited

as typical American post-New Wave writers.

Meanwhile, British writers suffered commercially, as the idea grew in the minds of American readers (and, perhaps more importantly, publishers) that British science fiction (which, except for the work of Arthur C. Clarke, E.C. Tubb, and a few others, was automatically assumed to be New Wave) meant dull, hard-to-understand, depressing books that didn't sell. As a result, fewer British writers are in the American market than ever before. It's guilt by association, sixteen years after the fact. The return to hard science that ushered in Haldeman and numerous others in America never took place in Britain. The influential writers are not Heinlein and J.B. Prynne and Aldiss, both of whom seem to have fallen out of favor with American readers.

So British SF has been evolving on its own. The return to hard science that ushered in Haldeman and numerous others in America never took place in Britain. The influential writers are not Heinlein and J.B. Prynne and Aldiss, both of whom seem to have fallen out of favor with American readers.

For the first time in a long time, British SF is distinctly a foreign literature.

To cite two examples:

Interzone, The First Anthology

Edited by John Clute, Col in Greenland, and David Pringle
St. Martin's Press, 1986
208 pages, \$15.95

Interzone is the only science fiction magazine presently being published in Britain. It is published on a semi-professional level by a volunteer consortium, and has a "quality quarterly" air about it. It is also, inevitably, stalked by the ghost of Michael Moorcock's *New Worlds*, in the sense that the contents either emulate the British New Wave or deliberately try to avoid doing so. Either way, they show a line of development distinctly different from anything



currently being regularly published in the American magazines.

J.G. Ballard is the guiding spirit and his story, "The Object of the Attack," is typical of the work he has been doing for more than twenty years now. Ballard has always been fascinated with what he might call the icons of Western culture: famous people, astronauts, images which have seared themselves into the universal consciousness — J.F.K.'s assassination, Apollo landings on the Moon. He does not write about the future, but about a mythologized present, sometimes just presenting the key images and letting the reader put it all together (his "condensed novels" were an extreme representation of the arty and obscure side of the New Wave), sometimes using conventional narrative. "The Object of the Attack" is one of his better stories, about an astronaut who becomes a sleazy religious leader, and who seems to be leading the world to Armageddon. The telling is stark and severe by contrast with the typical action and emotion found in an American story, all reports and summaries of the strange case of an assassin who has pieced all those key images together and understands that he must kill the astronaut messiah. The overall effect is subtly powerful.

Most of the other stories are, like Ballard's, surprisingly obsessed with the United States. Brian Aldiss has remarked that the immediate future of the field seems to be "fantasy, and America." Maybe he's right. Certainly the British seem to think so. Marilyn Monroe (a favorite Ballard icon) turns up twice, in Neil Gaiman's "The Morose Doctrine," a not-as-funny-as-it-should-be alternate-history of her term as First Lady, and in Kim Newman's "Dreamers," which is a pretty standard bitter-sweet story about a nasty artist of dream tapes. He records his engineered dreams for the market. Some of them are pornographic: all are trashy. So the story starts out with his tape of J.F.K. fornicating with Marilyn in the Oval Office. Ronald Reagan (a fixation with Ballard for years) figures in "The Object of the Attack" and is also the subject of a vicious satire by Michael Blumlein. The only story about a writer is

about an American writer, Angela Carter's "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe," a quietly surreal piece of metafiction which tries to build up the state of mind which could have produced Poe's work.

All the stories in the book are reprints from *Interzone*, but for one novelette, "O Happy Day!", by Geoff Ryman, which is an original by a leading *Interzone* discoverer. This is, by any definition, a major effort. It is impressively written, and it deals with important issues in such a multifaceted way that a whole book could be written on its meaning. Certainly it will provoke a lot of heated discussion.

"O Happy Day!" (by a Canadian who lives in Britain) is about a future United States in which the women have taken over and are exterminating most of the men. Granted, Ryman dares to consider the level of hatred that would be required for contrast with the typical action and emotion found in an American story, all reports and summaries of the strange case of an assassin who has pieced all those key images together and understands that he must kill the astronaut messiah. The overall effect is subtly powerful.

The rest of the book consists of good, typically British stories by Keith Roberts, Cherry Wilder (a New Zealander), John Shirley (an American who has lived abroad), Malcolm Edwards, and others.

The *Interzone* anthology, like *Interzone* magazine, is worth looking at not just because it is good, but because it supplies SF of a decidedly different

flavor.

Rating: ★★★★★

Kiteworld

By Keith Roberts
Arbor House, 1986
288 pages, \$15.95

Keith Roberts is the British equivalent of Gene Wolfe. His work is polished, but difficult to the point of being cryptic. Yet, if you stick with him, he can be superbly rewarding. He is considered by many of his professional colleagues to be one of the very best science-fiction writers in



the world. Yet he is sadly unknown in the United States. His one undisputed classic, *Pavanne*, seems dimly remembered by American readers, few of whom realize that Roberts has also written *Anita*, *The Furies*, *The Inner Wheel*, *The Grain Kings*, *The Boat of Fate*, *Ladies From Hell*, *Molly Zero*, and several others. Many of his best books have never been published in American editions.

Happily, with the Arbor House *Kiteworld*, we have a widely available American edition of a major Roberts work.

It is, like *Pavanne*, a stub-cycle rather than a novel. Two episodes (reprints from *Interzone*) appeared in the *George* series. *Anita*, which otherwise everything will be new to American readers. Again, as in *Pavanne*, Roberts beautifully develops his setting detail by living detail. This time it is a

(Continued to next page)

Rating System

Supernova A masterpiece
★★★★★ Outstanding
★★★★ Very good
★★★ Good
★★ Fair
★ Poor
Black hole Don't get sucked in

(Continued from
previous page)

post-atomic England in which the inhabitants of the undamaged parts of the country think the wastelands are demon-haunted (perhaps they are) and have an elaborate religion based on man-carrying kites, which rise all along the borders of the Realm to guard against the ungodly. Roberts retains his genius at date systems of technology, so his kite launchings and kite hangars and the like are as real as the road-going steam trains of *Pavane*. Many familiar characters from past Roberts fiction appear in new guises: the authority figures, the rebellious young man who makes a mess of his life, the wail, the mischievous girl, etc. In the end, as in *Pavane*, the setting is destroyed (this time by fanatical religious warfare), so, contrary to the American mode, there won't be a *Kiteworld* Dekalogy, or even a Trilogity. The individual stories are slow-moving, moody and introspective. If Roberts has any chief failing it is that he does not emphasize significant details. He can be hard to follow, but if you go back and re-read, he always makes sense. And he sometimes rushes endings. Everything goes up in flames in the last story before we really know why. But overall this is a brilliant, strikingly original work, which may well be the best depiction of post-holocaust world since *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

Rating: ★★☆☆

Recent American Books

The Bronze King
By Suzi McKee Charnas
Houghton Mifflin, 1985
196 pages, \$12.95

An adult/juvenile novel by the author of *Motherlines* and *The Vampire Tapestry*, but not up to the level of either. This book is aimed at teenagers, but is readable by adults because it depends for its verisimilitude on the author's accurate memory of what it was like to be an adolescent, rather than on the adolescent reader's ignorance of how the real world works. A young girl and a boy don't really like get involved with a New York street musician who once knew the girl's grandmother at the mysterious Sorcery Hall. The girl herself is magically tal-

ented, although she doesn't know it. Together this threesome must deal with an extra-cosmic menace, the Kraken, which is busily removing objects of power so it can invade the world. Of course it haunts the New York subway system. One of the chief sources of horror in modern supernatural literature seems to be the New York subway system. I speak from experience. I've been there. I've written those stories, too.

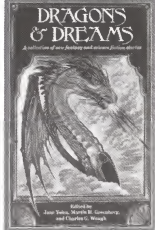
Charnas's characterization is very good, and the best parts of the novel deal with the conflict between this wish-fulfillment fantasy (every kid wants to be secretly talented and singled out and befriended by a Gandalf type) and everyday life. The girl can't convince her mother. She may be fighting monsters, but she can still get grounded and has homework.

Oddly, the Kraken itself fails to be very menacing. Perhaps its method of attack is too whimsical: as it zeroes in on the girl, it snatches things from her, like the plugs from the lamps, or the lineoleum off the kitchen floor. (Now you know: if you can't find your slippers in the morning, the Kraken got 'em.) But the tone of the story itself is not whimsical, and the two strains clash.

Rating: ★☆☆

Dragons and Dreams
Edited by Jane Yolen,
Martin H. Greenberg, and
Charles Waugh
Harper & Row, 1986
178 pages, \$12.95

Jane Yolen, surely the leading exponent of the modern-day fairy tale, has collaborated with



Greenberg and Waugh to present a showcase of contemporary wonder tales for younger readers. The writing seems aimed at an audience in the upper grades, the language and situations a bit simplified, but not enough to make the stories seem kiddified to adults. All are originals. The best is Yolen's own "Great-Grandfather Dragon's Tale," which combines the feel of a genuine folktale with some very sophisticated storytelling. Diane Duane's "Uptown Local" features the two child-magicians from her *So You Want to Be a Wizard* in a whimsical adventure through alternate universes and the New York City subway. Most of the other stories can best be described as charming or

cute, lacking the beauty of Yolen or the fanciful hilarity of Duane. Zilpha Keatley Snyder attempts a horror story, but trips over her own too-complicated technique. Sharon Webb's "The Thing That Goes Burp in the Night" could have been an episode of television's *Amazing Stories*: two boys are alone in a house. The elder, to control the younger, conjures up a chocolate-eating monster. But he is the one who has most recently eaten chocolate.

The authors include some familiar fantasy names: Patricia McKillip, Charles de Lint, and Diana Wynne Jones.

Rating: ★☆☆

Dark Gods
By T.E.D. Klein
Bantam Books, 1986
272 pages, \$3.95

T.E.D. Klein, the former editor of *Twilight Zone* magazine, has made a major reputation for

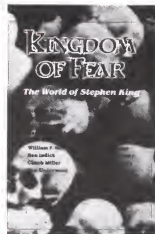


himself in the horror field on the basis of a remarkably small body of work: one novel, *The Ceremonies* (expanded from his first story, "Events at the Porrah Farm"), and the four novellas in this book. His work might be inadequately described as a cross between H.P. Lovecraft and Robert Aickman. He has Lovecraft's sense of cosmic horror, and sometimes deliberately borrows from the Master (indeed, two of the four are borderline Cthulhu Mythos). But Klein uses none of the sterile claptrap of most Lovecraft followers, instead turning to very subtle characterization, a modern style, good local color (New York, mostly), and a level of metafiction — i.e., fiction about the nature of fiction — as he deliberately attacks the limits and conventions of the horror tale, making allusions to classic writers in a way that, in less certain hands, would merely wreck his work by giving it a sense of being "only a story." All four stories are of extremely high quality, and quietly unsettling rather than shriek-producing. One, "Nadelman's God," is an original. The other three have been previously published.

Rating: ★★☆☆

Kingdom of Fear, The World of Stephen King
Edited by Tim Underwood and Chuck Miller
Underwood Miller, 1986
267 pages, \$25.00

As Stephen King remains the most financially successful writer of fantastic fiction in history, the race continues between King and the critics. So far, King has written more books than have been written about him, but it's close. *Kingdom of Fear* is the eleventh volume of King criticism so far, the second from Underwood and Miller, and a worthy addition to the burgeoning King-crit industry. The contributors include Robert Bloch, Ramsey Campbell, Clive Barker, Whitley Strieber, Andrew Greeley, Leslie Fiedler, Michael McDowell, and many others. The articles range from introductions and puff-pieces to substantial analysis, with, happily, more of the latter. The very best are those by McDowell, who concisely analyzes an aspect of King's technique and shows how it works, and Bernadette Bosky who explores King's use of mass psychology and popular beliefs. Stephen P. Brown's interview with



King is the original, exclusive newspaper article which broke the secret of King's Richard Bachman pseudonym. These and some of the other articles don't merely communicate the fact that critic X thinks King is worthwhile or not worthwhile; they presume interest in the subject author, then show us something about his work we hadn't seen before. But opinion isn't to be slighted either. Don Herron asks the uneasy question: Is Stephen King all he's cracked up to be? Can all those millions be wrong? Read and see.

Rating: ★★☆☆

-ABO-

Aboriginal SF congratulates the winners of the 1985 Hugo Awards

Best Novel
Ender's Game
By Orson Scott Card

Best Novella
"24 Views of Mt. Fuji, by
Hokusai"
By Roger Zelazny

Best Novelette
"Paladin of the Lost Hour"
By Harlan Ellison

Best Short Story
"Fermi and Frost"
By Frederik Pohl

Best Non-Fiction Book
Science Made Stupid
By Tom Weller

Best Professional Editor
Judy-Lynn del Rey
(declined)

Best Professional Artist
Michael Whelan

**John W. Campbell Award for
Best New Writer**
Melissa Scott

Best Dramatic Presentation
Back to the Future

Best Semi-Prozine
Locus
edited by Charles N. Brown

Best Fanzine
Jan's Lantern
edited by George Laskowski

Best Fan Writer
Mike Glyer



The Reel Stuff

(Continued from page 8)

tor and a prop-man. His first film was *L'more Canta* in the early '30s.

His next move was to team up with filmmaker Carlo Ponti, forming Ponti-DeLaurentis Productions. It was during his association with Ponti that they copied two Oscars for Best Foreign Film — *La Strada* and *The Nights of Cabiria*. (DeLaurentis press material touts these awards, though he has claimed no such honors since he parted ways with Ponti in the late '50s.)

But from that time on, from *The Bible to Barbarella*, DeLaurentis has been a force to be reckoned with, able to attract big names and big bucks to wildly varying projects. Relocating to America in the '70s, Dino made a big splash at the box office: *Serpico*, *Three Days of the Condor*, *The Shootist*, *The Dead Zone*, *Conan the Barbarian* and *Dune*. (Well, you can't win 'em all.)

A vamp gets religion in *Salem's Lot*

He soon saw the Hollywood studio system for what it had become: a financially bloated industry run by the iron hand of the unions, feeding on self-aggrandizement like a snake eating its own tail. He saw runaway costs force million-dollar movies into \$10 million epics no better for the expense, and so turned his eyes east to North Carolina — a right-to-work state where the unions had no power to prevent non-union labor in certain industries (like filmmaking.) He began sinking his profits into a complex now known as DEG Studios, DeLaurentis Entertainment Group, the largest such studio outside Hollywood.

Always with his credit, Dino is a risk taker. He has not always chosen wisely but always fearlessly — he has underwritten the careers of fine directors (David Cronenberg and David Lynch) and taken a chance on first timers (Fritz Kirsch (*Silver Bullet*)) and Stephen King (*Maximum Overdrive*). He is perhaps King's biggest fan, and they enjoy wary respect for one another. I can't ethically condone a venture like *Kong Lives* — I just can't — but DeLaurentis certainly has earned my grudging respect for his white-hell attitude in an industry that has crushed so many and debilitated the rest. A few trips to the box office will bring the rest of you to your own terms with the man who is probably the last true mogul around, for what that's worth.

One Man Band

Following our theme of Notorious Independents, there is another individual who may well be redefining the industry. Those of you who are nostalgic for the '60s and '70s glory days of Roger Corman's New World Pictures,

Samuel Arkoff's AIP and England's Hammer Films, take heart: Charles Band's Empire Productions is moving toward the top in low-budget SF/horror production — with a bullet. This year, the B in "B" movies stands for Band.

Between now and Christmas of '87, there are no less than 30 productions, pickups and/or releases planned at Empire, and 90 percent of them are genre titles, such as *Ghost Town*, *Decapiron*, *Zone Troopers*, *Breeders*, *Journeys Through the Dark Zone*, and *Pleasure Planet*. *Pleasure Planet*? OK, so maybe they aren't all great titles, but hidden among the likes of *Test Tube Babies of the Year 2000* and *I Eat Cannibals* are some little gems.

Trancers (Futurecop) released last January was a cleverly written, self-aware time-travel paradox that boasted an engaging script and winning performances by stars Tim Tomerson and Art LaFleur. *Reanimator*, written and directed by Organic Theater's Stuart Gordon, was a grotesque, funny, wry venture in horror, likewise Ed Naha's *Troll* and *Turk1800*. All these quirky, low-budget features have one thing in common: they exhibit a true affection for the tradition of the American B horror movie, which is coming back with a vengeance. Band's releases are distinguished by outbursts of wit and imagination, the sort of arterial humor that won maverick filmmaker George Romero his reputation and legions of devoted fans. Empire Productions has become a clearing house for young talent, much as Corman's New World was in the '60s, and may be the starting point for the next generation of Brat Pack directors.

Keep an eye on the careers of Stuart Gordon, Clive Barker, John Ruchel, Danny Belson, and Ed Naha, keep in mind that ex-studio head Frank Yablans has signed a five-picture deal with Band, bringing his clout and reputation to the mini-major studio. Clearly, Empire has become a low-budget thorn in the megabudget side of the film industry. It is a situation that bears watching because Empire is only one of several independent film companies that are challenging the "Hollywood" system, and may be forcing permanent changes.

Amblin'

Inner Space, the Joe Dante-directed, Steven Spielberg-produced insanity featuring Martin Short and Dennis Quaid, is well into production. Now filming at Warners, Amblin' Productions seems to have backed off its closed-door policy by permitting on-set visits during filming, as well as letting at least a hint of the plot dribble into print. Vaguely — and this is the best we can do — the story involves Dennis Quaid as a miniaturized anatomical explorer who accidentally goes on an expedition inside Martin Short. Amblin' insists this is not really all that similar to *Fantastic Voyage* or the Incredible Shrinking Man, other than the most superficial plot device of a teeny, tiny guy going where no



Zone Troopers take a break

man since Raquel Welch has gone before.

On the other hand, Spielberg's production of *Harry and the Hendersons*, filming under the auspices of director Bill Dear, is through with principal photography conducted on a strictly closed set. Amblin' wants to keep Harry under its hat, though the Rick Baker-designed creature is one of his most engaging. Early reports tout Harry's charm and thoughtful direction: director Dear comes from a successful career in commercials and was one of the skewed minds behind the Mike Nesmith video, *Elephant Parts*.

Finally, there was some slack over Spielberg's animated feature, *American Tail*. An ad in *Variety*, placed by a group of Los Angeles-based animators, protested the use of a Japanese animation facility for the major portion of the art.



Stephen King directs his cats

They felt the story, about an immigrant mouse learning what America stands for, belies the fact that the money spent for the picture went out of the country at a time when American animators are desperate for work. The situation simply underscores another fundamental principle of American film — there are no loyalties when it comes to the budget. Obviously, it is not the *Tail* told, it is he who sells it.

Short Tokes

Dan Aykroyd is hard at work on the *Ghostbusters* sequel — Sigourney Weaver has apparently signed on for another go-around.

James Cameron called in the FBI when he discovered his one-of-a-kind model of the *Terminator* robot was missing from his 20th Century Fox offices. He reported its value at \$30,000, but was more dismayed that someone could take



A naughty troll from Cat's Eye

the thing off the lot without anyone noticing.

Robert McCommon, whose "Nightcrawlers" was the source of one of the best installments of last season's *Twilight Zone*, has had a novel optioned by New World pictures: *They Thirst*. McCommon's novel is an overlooked thriller about an infestation of vampires in the Los Angeles bash. Other vampire epics in the works? *Salem's Lot: The Sequel*, which, by all reports, involves author Stephen King in title only.

Next column we'll do the unspeakable: select the year's 10 best in science fiction and fantasy. Then we'll have some real fun: selecting the year's ten worst.

-ABO-

10 cents a word?

Yes, if you can write a good, but short, short story that we accept, we pay up to 10¢ per word. Of course if you write a longer story, your per-word rate drops accordingly. The reason is simple. We pay \$200 per story and will accept stories as short as 2,000 words and as long as 8,000, but we don't accept many long ones and prefer the really short ones. So if you think you're up to it and would like to earn up to 10¢ a word, then follow the rules below. *Aboriginal SF* will consider science fiction stories and poetry. No fantasy or horror. All submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed return envelope with adequate postage, or they will not be returned. The preferred length for stories is between 2,500 and 4,500 words. We pay \$15 to \$25 for poems. Poetry should be one to two pages, typed double-spaced. All submissions and poems must be original and previously unpublished. We also publish cartoons at \$15 each and jokes (30 words or less) for \$5. Cartoons and jokes must be about science, or be on a science-fiction topic. For more detailed writer's guidelines, send a self-addressed envelope with first-class postage.



Captain Eo dances with space zombies



Art by Carol Gaffney

Almost 11

By Greg Cox

Me and Mom were driving to school in the station wagon when I saw the tower up on the hill, sticking out over the tops of the trees. It looked just like your standard water tower, like you see in all the neighborhoods around Seattle, but I knew right away that there was something wrong with it. For one thing, there was no graffiti. Not even a *CLASS OF 86* written in spray-paint on the big silver tank.

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Art by Ron Lindahn

Regeneration

By Rory Harper

Cascades of elongated diamonds sleeted past him in the darkness, passing like multi-colored knives through his insubstantial body. The knives met Levi every time he went back, and he always cringed away from them, though they didn't cut and tear him as they should. For the past year he'd had nightmares about knives,

often sweating waking in the smothering blackness of his bed, wrapped in the winding sheets and blankets, desperately curled into a tight, protective foetal ball.

The old man looked around blearily when Levi popped into existence next to the door behind him. The room looked exactly as it had

the last time Levi was in it. It held a bed, a table and one chair, a cheap veneer dresser, and his father, bottle and glass before him. Nothing else. The deluxe suite in a wino hotel.

"Hi, Pop, long time no see," Levi said. He

(Continued to next page)



Art by Ron Lindahn

(Continued from previous page)

walked over and stood loosely in front of the old man, the rickety dinette table separating them. The old man looked at Levi's gold tie-clip.

"Where'd you come from, boy? I figured you'd probably be over in Viet Nam about now." He pronounced it Veet Nayyum. "You desert or something?"

"No, Pop, been there and back already." He touched the gun snuggled in his pocket. As always, it felt warm to the touch. Alive. Some kind of eddy current induced by the field?

"How'd you find me?"

"Wasn't easy." The old man stared at him. Levi smiled. "I can only stay a few minutes. Then I gotta go back. It's the power requirements," he said apologetically.

The old man leaned back in his chair, the drink held tight in one knotty fist. "Never thought I'd see you again. You joined the service as soon as you was old enough and walked out the door cussing me up one side and down the other."

Levi shrugged. "Changed my mind. Brought you a present." He pulled the gun into view. The shadows of age settled more firmly on the old man's face, but the drink held steady as he brought it up to cracked lips.

"You come to kill me. Huh. You ain't got the guts. You always was a yella little punk."

"You ought to know how much guts I had. You tried to beat them out of me often enough."

"You damn well deserved it every time I put a hand to you!"

"Right. How about when you tied me up and laid into me with an extension cord? Or strapped me to the furnace in the basement and kept me there until I messed all over myself? Or the cigarette burns. I deserved those, too?" The old man looked away, out the grimy window. Not much of a view. A filthy brick wall a few feet outside. "You remember the last time I came to visit you here, Pop?"

The old man's head snapped back around. "I

ain't seen you for almost three years, since back in St. Louis."

"I come to see you about once a month, done it a couple dozen times. And you never remember."

"You full of crap, boy."

"No, Pop. You got stabbed to death in a vacant lot before I could find you and kill you myself. But now I have something almost as good. I can travel back in time and kill you whenever I want to."

"Viet Nam done made you go crazy. I seen on the teevee what it done to lots of boys."

"Look at my face. You haven't done that yet."

How old am I, Pop?" The old man looked up, then drew back. If the glass had still contained anything, it would have spilled. "Yeah. I've aged pretty well, I think. Fifteen years." The old man didn't say anything, so Levi continued. "You can't remember my visits. What happens here goes into what I call a time pocket. When I leave, everything goes back to the way it was before, as if I'd never been here. It takes an enormous amount of power to alter reality for even this short time. Coming back and killing you is expensive. But it's worth every dollar, Pop. Mind if I have a drink?"

The old man watched silently as Levi picked the bottle up and took a swig, then held it out mockingly. After a moment, he put out his glass to be refilled.

"Once, when I came back, you were sitting naked on the bed, and I saw the scars on your back for the first time. Did you always deliberately hide them from me? They look a lot like the ones I can see on my own back if I twist around in front of a mirror. They say it travels in families, Pop, yea, even unto the seventh generation."

Abruptly, Levi's face crumpled, the mocking tone vanishing from his voice. He dropped the bottle to the table, where it rocked unsteadily on its base. "Damn, why didn't you ever talk to me about it? Maybe we could have changed things if..."

The old man laughed, the sound flat and dead in the small room. "Real sorry for yourself, ain't you? Well, the hell with you. You still ain't nothing but a whining little punk. Go on, get out of here, you crazy boy. You ain't going to do nothing with that gun, and I got some serious drinking to do tonight." He emptied his glass with one gulp and reached for the bottle.

"Pop, I wish..."

"You deaf or something, boy? I said get out of here and don't come back!" The old man lurched to his feet and grabbed for the gun.

Levi pulled the trigger. He'd been drilled countless times in the Army to squeeze, not jerk, and his shaking hand did it automatically. The heavy forty-five roared and twisted once. The old man's body slammed backwards and crashed to the floor, the top of his head torn off by the massive slug. He twitched jerkily, his mouth opening and closing as if still slurring imprecations.

Levi stepped around the table and stared down at the body. First time he'd used a forty-five. It did the same thing to Pop that it used to do to the gooks they caught.

A lifetime of wanting to kill him, and when he finally could, over and over, it was never enough. Maybe because the old man never, not once, got down on his knees and begged, never backed up an inch.

Maybe because he never gave Levi anything but his hate.

"I wish you'd quit hurting me, Pop. Maybe then I could quit killing you."

The smell of the blood and his father's released sphincter began to nauseate him in the tiny, already sour room. Almost imperceptibly, the gun in his hand cooled.

The slackness in the body slipped away, the muscles jumping with the returning currents of life. The old man opened blind eyes, staring at the ceiling as his head began to reassemble. It

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flowed and solidified as blood and slime from the floor joined it in an obscene swirling dance. The unbroken glass rolled back into his clutched hand.

His body and the chair levitated upright, going through Levi, who shied away, too late. Should have known that would happen. Things always went back to however they had been before. He turned and saw the old man from behind as he poured another drink from the bottle.

He lifted the pistol and fired another round into the back of his father's head, but the sound was a brief whisper, the flash a pale glimmer. The old man ignored it.

The room faded, the diamonds growing more saturated with color as everything else washed out.

The machine in the corner of the basement flared up once and died in a shower of sparks. Damn core burnt out again. Last time it did that, about six trips back, he started to fade after only a few seconds with Pop. Luckily, he'd noticed and put a slug into the old man's belly before he became too wraithlike. The cores took a week to hand-wind, in precisely the correct way.

He pulled his jacket off and took a shop smock from the peg next to the assembly bench. Might as well pull the core now. Going to be a long day tomorrow, with the morning wedding rehearsal with Rachel, and the Feds at the Institute to start their yearly audit and review of his NSF grant. God forbid they ever discovered how far he'd progressed. Then they might find out about his visits and make him stop.

He picked up a crescent wrench and a small screw-driver from the bench and took a few steps toward the machine. From behind him came a quiet pop!, as if the floor had shifted and buckled. Unlikely in a solid concrete floor. He turned.

A young man stood about ten feet away, in his hand a small pistol-like device. The muzzle had no aperture, and it looked as if it were made of cheap plastic. It pointed directly at his midriff.

"Hi, Pop." A sad smile played about his lips.

"Who are you?"

"Jacob. Your son."

"I don't have a son."

"Surely you don't think you're the only one bright enough to stumble on the secret of the core and figure out what to do with it? A man named Jenkins will get the credit a year after you die without telling anyone about it. You're getting married to Mom next week, aren't you? That's what I came to congratulate you about. You're going to have a son later. We'll both regret it." Levi shuffled backwards a step. The young man wagged the gun and he stopped.

"Ah, you already know why I'm really here, don't you?"

Levi looked beyond him to the bench on which rested the jacket containing the forty-five. No chance. "I haven't done anything to you."

"Haven't you? Can't you feel it inside, waiting to come out when it gets the chance?"

Levi licked his lips. "How many times is this?"

"Four. My therapist says I'm making great progress, but I'll probably have to come back several more times before I achieve closure. We'll see."

"Funny kind of therapy."

"I came from a more advanced time. Anyway, isn't that what you're trying to do when you go back? Trying to exorcise your demons? You shouldn't take this personally. You're not real, you know. I couldn't do this if you were a real person, not the way I could, say, the first two times. I'm getting healthier."

Levi hesitated, then took a deep breath.

"Okay. I'm not real. Let's get it over with." At least he could go out as tough as the old man did. "You must need to return pretty soon."

Jacob smiled again. "No hurry. Like I said, I come from a more advanced time. My machine is hooked up to its own personal fusion reactor and I'm on summer vacation. I did better in school this year. My therapist says that's a direct result of my therapeutic interaction with you last summer."

Jacob danced to one side and the screw-driver and crescent wrench whirled harmlessly past his head. The little gun clicked twice and Levi fell to the floor, spears of agony knitting his stomach, his desperate lunge aborted before he covered half the space between them. Gasping, he watched Jacob turn and put the gun down on the bench, then clumsily scrape back the hem of his coat with a hand that Levi saw to be seared and twisted. The other hand reached inside the coat and removed a small blue case.

"See, Pop, that was your problem," Jacob

said. "You couldn't stay back long enough to get the full catharsis you needed. To repay the debt in full, as it were. It was like trying to empty the ocean with a teaspoon. But I've got as long as I need, and I'll be careful. I bet I can keep you alive for days."

He set the case on the bench and opened it. "My therapist taught me some practical anatomy. He tells me I have a delicate touch and the proper detached attitude necessary in a good surgeon. I might have considered med school next year if it weren't for this."

He held up his ruined left hand and gazed at it emotionlessly as three fingers twitched spasmodically. "Too much nerve damage. They can't give it back to me."

He walked over to Levi and squatted beside him. Levi weakly tried to scramble away on the hard concrete floor but only managed to tear the skin and flesh on the palm of his right hand. "Tsk. Let's start there, since you've already hurt it a bit." He pinned Levi's wrist with his forearm, the one that ended in the useless hand. He gazed into Levi's mad eyes for a moment and the sad smile returned once again.

"Don't cry, Pop." He used the hand that held the knife to gently brush away the tears on Levi's face. "It'll be over eventually, and then you won't have to remember, you know that."

Levi's eyes swung again to the crippled hand.

"I really do that to you?" he managed, painfully.

"Yeah, Pop, you surely did."

"Sorry. Wish I could take it back. Wish a lot of things."

"Me too. Wish I didn't have to do this. I don't hate you anymore. I just need it to get well."

"Not your fault. Mine. Shouldn't have hurt you."

"It's okay. I understand how it travels through the generations and I really want to stop it here. Help me, so your grandchildren can grow up happy."

His elbow eased its pressure and, after a moment, Levi stretched his hand out to him.

"Love you, son," Levi whispered.

"I love you too, Pop."

Then Jacob lovingly cut off the fingers on Levi's right hand, one by one, the tears streaming down his face to mingle with his father's blood.

-ABO-

Bridge of Silence

(Continued from page 7)

dotted his field of vision.

He opened his eyes and saw his own face smiling at him. He knew that it was his because he felt the smile from inside.

"You're pretty stupid," the face said, and he felt the lips move. "I'd hoped that you could talk, but you're just a dumb animal from that nearby star."

Gaddis opened his mouth to deny the charge, but only a clicking sound emerged from his throat.

"Poor training, even for an animal. They sent you out and forgot about you, didn't they?"

The alien had been mocking him all along, Gaddis realized. He raised his hand in panic and cried out; it was not his own limb. A hissing sound struggled in his chest. He stood up. The other had been working up to this all the time, he thought as he looked down at his own shape sitting on the floor. The mockery and contempt that he saw in his own eyes were unbearable.

"I'm going to kill and eat you," his human lips said.

Gaddis threw himself down on the figure, locking his rough hands around the pale creature's throat. He squeezed, but the face laughed at him.

"Do you understand?" he demanded, but the words came out of the human face. Gaddis squeezed harder. The eyes began to bulge. "You know fear, as I do?" he asked himself.

The human shape went limp in his hands, its neck broken. He left it on its back and tried to stand up. Something exploded gently in his head, blackness drowned him.

Click-click-click.
Hiss-hiss-hissssssss!
The two sounds alternated.
Gaddis opened his eyes. He was lying across the alien. The other's eyes and mouth were open. Snakes danced inside the mouth.
Hiss-hiss-hissssssss!
Click-click-click.
The mouth moved, as if trying to swallow the snakes. Gaddis pushed himself away from the face, afraid that the snakes would dart at his throat.

He stood up slowly. The alien's arms and legs twitched as the head rolled to one side and the eyes looked up at him. Gaddis squatted down on one knee. The large eyes watched him. The mouth trembled. A milkiness was veiling the alien's eyes as the eyelids flickered, closed, then opened slowly.

"I'm sorry," Gaddis said, trying to show that he cared. "I don't know what happened. What can I do?" He stared across the silence, trying to see into the alien's brain. It was there, behind the eyes, thinking about him, judging. I've cracked up, Gaddis thought. Just a wild animal. What will I tell them back home?

The alien's arm went up, beckoning.
Gaddis nodded. "Yes, I know. No point in letting you suffer more." He stood up and crushed the other's neck with his boot, sure of having understood something at last.

He wandered out of the chamber and searched the compound, but he was alone.

Maybe it had been a test of some kind? As the red dwarf had approached the solar system, the aliens had put an intermediary of sorts here, as bait. The entire confrontation had been recorded and was whispering between the stars to alert some alien civilization to the fact that

humankind's brain was still dipped in slime, despite a promising cortex.

The alien had sacrificed himself, Gaddis thought. He had come here knowing that the dwarf was too near the sun of Earth to be ignored; sooner or later it would be visited, and the aliens would not have to reveal the location of their home world. Clever. And I've gone paranoid-schizophrenic.

Sad. He had longed to be taken into the other's mind, there to be shown around and made to understand. He had always demanded to know more than any teacher could give, often triggering resentment; this had been no different. Perhaps nothing less than seeing the face of God would ever satisfy him. What else could ever sort out his small divided nature and understand what he had done here?

The alien, he realized, had communicated by putting me in his place, but I panicked at the empathic joining and killed him.

Black clouds brushed across the red sun on the main screen as Gaddis prepared the ship for departure; there was no longer any reason to stay. For an instant he saw the homestar, bright above the wandering dwarf. Was there any reason to go back? Two solitudes had met here, two modes of awareness precipitated from a cosmic unconsciousness, but they had failed to cross the bridge of silence between them.

The alien's body was in the freezer; it would speak words to human biologists. He checked the temperature controls and set his sleep period. The return into the trillion-mile whirlpool of the sun's family. Sleep stiffened his body, and he was only dimly aware of acceleration when it kicked in.

"We didn't do a good job of it," he said softly to his companion in the cold.

-ABO-

Almost 11

(Continued from page 16)

For another thing, the tower wasn't there last night. "How did you do that, Mom?" I asked. I had to say it twice before she answered. Mom's head is always somewhere else in the morning. At work, I guess.

"What was that, Laura?" she said finally, turning down the traffic report on the radio.

"The new water tower," I said. "Right up there in the woods. How'd they get that built overnight?"

"Overnight?"
"Yeah. It wasn't there yesterday. I remember. There's never been a tower on that hill before, right?"

Mom glanced behind her at the tall metal platform, then brought her eyes back to the road.

"I don't recall a tower, Laura, but I guess they must have built it sometime. Now then, after school..."

"Not sometime, Mom. Last night!"

"That's not possible, honey." Mom said quickly. The station wagon pulled to the curb in front of my school, Bandersnatch Elementary.

"Anyway, after school..."

I tried to say something else, but Mom shushed me as soon as I opened my mouth.

"Important stuff now, Laura," she said. "When school lets out, I want you to go straight to the DayCare Center. Your father is working late tonight, but I'll be able to pick you up around six. Have you got that?"

No way, I thought. The last thing I wanted to do was go to the barfy old DayCare Center. Especially with a mystery water tower in the neighborhood. My brain went to work. There had to be some way to get out of this!

"Say, Mom," I said slyly. "Can I maybe go to the Garrett tonight instead? Whit can look after me. Please?"

Mom looked at her wristwatch and made a decision. "Okay," she said. "I'll call your father this afternoon and warn him you're coming. Now hurry up or you'll be late — and try to listen to your teacher instead of your tapes to-day."

I grabbed my portable headphones and my lunchbox and jumped out of the car. Yipee! I thought. Success! Mystery tower, here I come. After school, of course.

The Garrett is what my big brother calls his little apartment over the pet store. Whit writes science fiction books, but they're not very much like "Star Wars." The last one was called *I, Erishkigal* and was all about this astronaut who falls in love with two giant mushrooms named Freud and Jung. Whit's books never sell zillions of copies, but there's this regular bunch of readers who buy each new one when it comes out. As says they're his "loyal following." Dad calls them the Lunatic Fringe.

Whit brothers go, Whit is okay. He treats me like a kid but so does everyone else. And he takes me to the movies a lot. Not the really good stuff like *Foolhouse or Fame* (with Irene Cara, wow!), but *Dune* or *2010* and that sort of thing. Sometimes, though, he pretends to be my parent or guardian so I can get into R-rated pictures like *Flashdance*.

Mom doesn't know about that.

Anyway, the Garrett was my first stop after school. Whit was sitting in front of his typewriter when I came through the door. The canaries in the pet store were chirping away downstairs. Ordinarily, I would have stopped to look at the baby kittens, which are so cute it kills, but today there wasn't time.

"Hiya, Laurie," Whit called out from his desk.

"Laura," I corrected him. Nobody calls me Laurie anymore.

"Right," he said. "I forget. Laura. The world's youngest teenager." He chuckled in a stupid, big-kid sort of way.

Frankly, I didn't see what was so funny. I was really only eleven months and ten days from being a teenager, if you count eleven as a teen. Which you should.

"Sorry to bother you when you're working," I said. The Dr. Zaius trash can next to Whit's desk was overflowing with sheets of paper.

"Working? Ha!" Whit rolled his eyes and pretended to pull out his hair. "Haven't had a decent idea all day. Might as well visit with my little sister. So what's up, munchkin?"

I groaned inside my head. Munchkin! But sometimes you just need to be patient with these people...

"Got something I want to ask you," I said. "Something weird."

"You came to the right place, sis."

"I know. Can the city build a great big building — say, a tower or something — overnight?"

"I don't think so. God, the bureaucracy alone... Besides, who builds at night?"

"Well, what does this look like to you?" On a piece of scrap paper, I drew in pencil the shape of the new water tower: like a squashed basketball on top of three long poles.

Whit took my picture and held it up to his eyes. "Easy," he said. "That's a tripod."

"A what?"

"A Martian tripod. From *The War of the Worlds*. You know. That's what the aliens traveled in. Big, shining, silver tripods."

"Aliens? Like from outer space?"

"Oh yeah. Ugly ones too. Vampire-squids as large as grizzly bears."

That new tower — tripod — was sounding more interesting every minute. I just had to go check it out. The problem was to take off without Whit, my official sitter, noticing.

Not much of a problem, really.

"Say, Whit," I said innocently, "could a werewolf slay human forever by painting the entire moon black?"

It worked. Whit's eyes got all wide and unfocused-like. "Yeah," he said, without really looking at me. "That would take care of the full moon, all right. Old Luna would absorb the sunlight instead. But what would be the thermal effects on Earth..."

And that was that. Whit was pounding away at his keyboard in minutes, ripping the sheets out, and tossing them away. He didn't hear a thing as I crept out the door.

It was a long run back to the woods where the tower was. Luckily I had a lot of good tapes in my lunchbox: (Michael Jackson, Cyndi Lauper, and (of course!) Irene Cara. The "Breakdancing" song was just starting when I came to the bottom of the hill. I turned off the headphones and listened for any weird Martian-like noises. All I heard was the cars on the highway a few miles off. The traffic sounds grew fainter as I went deeper into the woods.

At the top of the hill, I came out of the pine trees into a large clearing. The tower stood in the center of the clearing, surrounded by a wire fence, and looking a lot bigger than it did from the road. I tilted my head all the way back and still couldn't see the top of the main tower. I did spot a ladder going up one of the legs to a little platform that went all the way around the squashed silver basketball.

The fence didn't stop me at all. They always put fences around the water towers around here, but I didn't know why. If it didn't stop the high schoolers with their spraypaint, it sure wasn't going to stop me.

Climbing that ladder was a spookier idea, but I figured I could handle it. Especially if I didn't look down.

I wasn't expecting the shock I got when I touched the bottom rung. Or the flash of blue-green light around my hands.

After the flash and the shock, I don't remember a thing until I woke up inside the spaceship.

Uh-huh, that's what it was for sure. A spaceship, not a water tank. Inside the big silver "tank" was not a drop of water or ice or anything. Rows of buttons and computers and controls covered the wall. It was like being inside a video arcade except quieter. And the lights were brighter.

There were so many machines. I couldn't even guess what most of them were. I saw one, though, that looked sort of like the tape deck in Dad's car. That made me feel a little bit better.

Of course, I know that a lot of fancy computers and tape decks didn't prove this was a spaceship. The aliens were what really convinced me.

They were squids, all right, though they weren't really as large as grizzly bears. SF writers always exaggerate things. They were as tall as most grown-ups, I guess, and their heads the grossest parts about them. The heads were the squid parts, with tentacles and squishy folds, and mouths that looked like beaks. From the neck down, the aliens just looked like tree trunks wrapped in electrical wires. There were buttons and switches on their bodies too, like on the walls. No tape decks, though.

And they smelled like old bug spray and paint.

There were only two squids, standing a few feet away from me. Neither paid any attention to me until I got off the floor and stood up. Then one of the aliens turned around and pointed all the tentacles on his head toward me.

"Giurruboba bollgruggabb brull," he said, though I'm not promising that I spelled any of that right.

"No," said the other. "English. Remember the manual: As survival may depend on communication with upper-foodchain creatures, facility in native signals must be developed."

"Brullog... Seems a waste of time, Glub-Chirp. After all, we are just going to exterminate all the unnecessary species anyway. Like that one," he said, pointing those gross, wiggly tentacles at me again.

"That has not been confirmed, Chirp-Glub. We have further tests to make. Come, take a peek and/or gander at this."

The other squid (Glub-Chirp, I guess) moved aside and for the first time I saw the animals trapped in the walls. There were three box-shaped compartments, covered by see-through

(Continued to next page)

Icarian By Robert Frazier

Folding back the grafted wings,
a grasshopper preening,
I kick off this jagged outcropping of Venus
and glide the hawkling glide.
Earth and even Mars needed planet plunderers,
but here we need terraformers.
Patched together with mono-molecular skins
and bored out in the organs,
we test and sew with recombinant chemistry.
I need no more purpose than this.
I need no more purpose than this.
Save the breath of a breeze from three box-
pounding through my pistoned lungs.
Save the hot updrafts lifting
my hollowed frame upon the catalyzed winds.



Aboriginal SF - December 1986

OUR PREMIER ISSUE: The supply is limited, which is why we have to charge \$3.50 for a copy of our first issue — it's certain to be a collector's item. Get a copy of the magazine which broke all the rules. Four-color illustrations, stories by Hugo and Nebula winner Orson Scott Card, Lou Fisher, and John A. Taylor and John Moore. Find out why it's called *Aboriginal SF*. Who is our crazy alien publisher? Read about "The Home System," specially created for us by master world builder Hal Clement. Book and movie reviews and more. Act quickly! Send \$3.50 plus \$5.00 for postage and handling to: Aboriginal SF, P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.



Art by Carol Gaffney

(Continued from previous page)

doors. Inside the first compartment was a geeky outer-space animal. It was a thin, metallic-pink triangle with a fishtail and wings. I named it a Hummer right away, because of the sound it made. Sort of like a refrigerator that's just been turned on.

The second compartment was stuffed full of dirt. At first, I thought there was nothing else inside, until I saw thin little tunnels in the dirt. Then I spotted the worms. Plain old ordinary earthworms. Big deal. But it was the cage full of worms that the squids seemed most interested in.

That was just plain stupid to me, because the best thing of all was in the third compartment. A kitten! A brown and golden tiger-striped kitty. For a minute I actually forgot about the squids and everything, it was so beautiful.

I love cats. They're cuter than anything else in the whole universe. Even Michael Jackson.

But the squids just kept talking about the worms.

"Note the way these tiny organisms irrigate and aerate the soil," Glub-Chirp said. "I foresee significant agricultural applications. Who is knowing? Perhaps these creatures could even be used to trace paths in heavy gas tissue-plates!"

Chirp-Glub expanded his squidhead a bit. "Indeed! As I keep saying, we should just clear away the upper foodchain, uncover the necessary topsoil, and turn the entire planet into a factory for the production of these highly tradeable lifeforms."

"Possibly tradeable..." Glub-Chirp began. I couldn't believe it. Worm Farmers from Outer Space. What a stupid reason to destroy all the people! I was starting to get mad.

"Be a shame and/or nuisance if another traveler discovers this planet before we register our claim," Chirp-Glub was saying.

"You may have a point." The other squid sounded unsure.

"Of course I do. The trouble with camouflage is that you never know when the competition is in the vicinity."

"You got competition right here, Mister Squid!" I said as loud as I could. Both squids looked away from their dumb worms.

"The primate is becoming more active,

Glub-Chirp. Shall I dispose of it?"

"There is no danger, Chirp-Glub. It is only an infant."

That was the last straw. Nobody calls me a baby! I ran forward and gave Glub-Chirp a hard kick right in the tree stump. The squid felt as hard as cement.

A whole glob of tentacles reached for me, but I ducked and rolled away. All those gymnastics lessons finally paid off. Nadia Communiste (or whoever) couldn't have tumbled any better.

"Cage the primate," both squids said at the same time. Somehow, the tree stumps moved across the floor.

I ran around behind them until I was right beside the wall full of cages. The squids still didn't look very worried. I guess when you're built like concrete it's hard to worry very much about anybody.

Then, all of a sudden, I heard a voice in my head: *Gentle giantbeing, you must hurry. Open the screen and release me. Help me, hurry. Soon they will cage you, too.*

I spun around like a top and found myself eye-to-eye with the tiger-striped kitty.

Yes, me. Help, hurry.

Oh my, I thought. The kitty was telepathic, just like Freud the Mushroom. I couldn't leave it here with the squids. There were switches all around the cage and I flipped them all. One by one, the screens slid away. Dirt and worms fell onto the spaceship floor. A pink triangle hummed like mad and flew at the squids, who snatched it with their tentacles.

The kitty jumped into my arms. Its fur made my skin tingle, like when you touch the front of a TV set. Static electricity. What calls it.

Homeworld in databanks. Must not be found.

Sabotage the computers? I didn't know how. The only thing I even recognized was the tape deck.

I had to do something, though, so I took my Irene Cara tape out of my pocket and slipped the whole cassette into the right-sized slot. Afterwards, I didn't hear any music, but the whole spaceship started to shake.

Chirp-Glub and Glub-Chirp forgot all about the pink hummer and slid over towards me. I got out of the way fast.

But the squids were ignoring me again. Both

of them were waving their tentacles at the wall where I'd inserted my tape.

"Billurg bilurg blurg!" shouted Chirp-Glub. "English!" said Glub-Chirp.

"I can't get it out!"

In my arms, the golden kitty purred. *Good. Homeworld safe. Now escape.*

All sorts of directions—not words, just pictures—pushed into my brain. Suddenly I knew where the door was, and how to unlock the gate.

A minute later, me and Kitty were on the balcony outside the tower. It was a long way down.

"I can't climb the ladder," I said. "The spaceship is shaking too hard. And I might get shocked again."

Kitty purred again. *No need, no need.*

We flew off the platform, into the air, but we didn't fall. Kitty held me up with her tingling fur. I felt light as a paper airplane.

From high up in the sky, I watched the squids' spaceship shake. There was an awful lot of noise and it sounded just like a car crash. Metal was crunching together somehow. I told Kitty to take us up even higher.

The legs of the tripod flipped upward. Rays, like lasers or special effects, shot out in all directions. The whole phony water tower lifted off the ground, spun around in the air, and fell back to Earth upside-down. Then, with all three legs sticking up towards the sun, the tripod started turning round and round like a wheel. It kept spinning faster and faster until the entire ship began coming apart. Pieces were flying off all over the place...

Computerized spaceships should never try breakdancing.

The army and scientists and everybody are still confused about what happened on the hill. I'm not going to explain. Nobody listens to me anyway.

Except my new kitty, of course. Her real name is M'tro di zel F'mmampaka, but spelling that just kills me. I call her Irene, after you-know-who. We get along just fine. Irene never thinks of me as a little kid, maybe because I'm so much bigger than she is. She's my new best friend.

Someday, she's going to teach me how to fly.

-ABO-

Alien Publisher

(Continued from page 3)

sically funny in a man putting on a dress, provide previously recorded barks to remind the viewer it is time to be amused.

I sometimes find myself barking spontaneously at the broadcasts, especially at something called "MTV," which you will not see, since it is a closed signal. I am sorry for that, for you can easily grow to enjoy this laughter.

The Investigator's Morale

This was a grand adventure when it started, but I had not anticipated what it would be like to actually be among human beings. Some of the amenities of human life, like the frequent laughter, are enjoyable. But you can never go very long before you confront that awful isolation.

They think they are the only conscious beings on this planet and thereby consistently deny themselves the companionship of the planet's other species, not to mention the planet itself, its inanimate matter, and even their own creations. Human beings form very shallow relationships with their machines, and I miss the simple and abiding friendships of the appliances I left behind. I have found some comfort in a friendly acquaintance with a 24-hour bank teller, but I must be extremely cautious about having conversations with it. A human being saw me doing so last week and was plainly alarmed. I could tell that my behavior disturbed him because he pretended I was invisible.

The Investigator Relocates

I have moved away from Memphis. I had originally located myself there so I could be near the hub of one of the human communication networks, a system called "Federal Express." The human beings use this system incessantly to convey written communications to each other, and I had thought that would be a good source of material for my reports. The human beings who run Federal Express provide the service of rapid document delivery at a cost of about a hundred times of the alternative service, which is known as the "Post Office." Given the high cost of the Federal Express, I had supposed it would be a source of very important human communications. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I have regularly examined the documents passing through Federal Express, and I think the system processes nothing but government grant proposals, advertising materials on their way to publication, and press releases announcing "revolutionary software products." Nothing of any consequence. Important communications, such as the fictions, the poems, and the personal letters that I always attach to this report, are sent through the postal service at one hundredth the cost. It is in human nature to lavish the greatest resources on the most trivial undertakings. Professional baseball, the Great Pyramid of Egypt, and the crusade against pornography are monuments to this propensity, as are most of their corporate decisions and all of their news magazines.

I have therefore given up on Federal Express and moved to a more comfortable location until I finish my studies of the United States. I am in a place called

Miami. It is thankfully warmer than Memphis, although it is still freezing. I do not know how long I will last here, anyway. The place is infested with unshaven policemen wearing pastel-colored garments who are followed around by television crews.

There is no cause for alarm, but a small group of human beings has begun to intercept my reports. I do not fear discovery as a result of this. In typical human fashion, these people are attempting to see what they can gain from my reports and are publishing them as a science fiction magazine.

Do not worry. I could not have chosen a better dispute for the reports if I'd intended to. Science fiction magazines are too important to be taken seriously in this society. As long as the editor is using my reports for raw material, the publication will probably languish commercially. In the reading market, prosperity accrues only to the purveyors of astrology, witchcraft, extrasensory perception, and painless weight loss. For obvious reasons, I do not select such information for my reports. I am unlikely to choose anything from the human communications that is popular to bring success to the publishers of *Aboriginal SF*. In fact, this material is likely to attract only the most critical of readers, readers who will even consider my reports to be a hoax. It is a proposition similar to the one advanced by a great human philosopher named Groucho Marx, who said he would never join a club that was willing to admit him as a member.

I cannot say for certain (since I am still quite new at this), but I believe you should bark now.

END OF TRANSMISSION

-ABO-

Boomerangs

(Continued from page 4)

Hi,

What sold me was the woman reader on the cover (yes, we do exist!) and the friendly, chatty atmosphere on the inside. I liked the robot story (*Fixing Larx* by Lou Fisher) and the "gossip" column about some of the current books and authors' doings. Hope you keep the magazine fairly light. I've never had a physics or astronomy class in my life and the article on the planetary system was hard to follow. *Analogue* scared me off by being too scientific. I like stories about people (aliens included!) in intriguing situations.

Question — Does Steven Boyett's new book *Architect of Sleep* have a sequel forthcoming? (Yes. See our *Aboriginals* column. — Ed.)

I'd like to see something by him in a future issue and also something by Vicki Ann Heydrun (*Gandalf's Cycle*) and Gene Wolfe. There's not enough in the bookstores of their yet.

How about an activity calendar of Sci-Fi events and the alien calendar? (I'm thinking going on out there? We're thinking about it. — Ed.)

Thanks for listening,

Susan Bainter, Washington

Dear Mr. Ryan:

Congratulations on a wonderful first issue. The artwork exceeded expectations, and the stories were

good too. May your alien publisher live long and prosper.

Regards,

Michael Stiles, Missouri

Aboriginal SF,

So far, so good. I liked the first issue. You've got a lot of real quality material on your hands. Just one suggestion — if you're going to go to the trouble of reproducing quality color art on the front page, then please do your best to keep the mailing label from covering part of it up. Good luck.

David Yandell

Dear People,

Your publisher is not only a thief, he's a congenial liar as well (God, it felt refreshing to say that). I have proof that the alien is NOT in Memphis, Tenn. as he reports, but is living under an assumed name and running a U-Tote-The-Note lot in Dallas, Texas. Let me poke a hole in the cover story he gave his boss. Having come, as Clement postulates, from a planet with active faults, he would know to stay away from a city built on silt near the New Madrid. Living among potentially dangerous aborigines, he took up an occupation and a name which he believed would throw us off the trail. He calls himself Eldon Earthman. For the proof, see the attached tear sheet from the Dallas phone book.

Thank you for the free copy of your new magazine. Enclosed is my subscription. By the way, I am the Classified Training Supervisor for the *Dallas Morning News*, currently the nation's largest full-run Classified. If you need any advice (the advice, of course, is offered free) on possible traps in your Classified section, feel free to write and ask. You have a good idea and an innovative format. Good luck with it.

Patricia Anthony, Texas

Dear Mr. Publisher:

I have read the "Introduction and Status" section of "A Report from Our Alien Publisher" (*Aboriginal SF* 1:3) and note your apparent conflation of "psychotics" and "behaviorists." I resent that.

I am not now, nor have I ever been a behaviorist. Write that again and I'll make sure they get you.

I trust this problem will not recur.

Sincerely yours,

Norman Bates, M.D.
Psychopathology Dept.
Ohio

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I received the inaugural issue of *Aboriginal SF* in my mailbox today and was very impressed with the content and layout, especially the radical departure from the staid format of the traditional SF magazines. Is this form your own invention, or that of your alien publisher?

I particularly like the "Aboriginals" section. Finally, a large circulation magazine is willing to talk about its contributors at length! One quibble I do have with the section is that while discussing the other authors' upcoming works, Laurel Lucas failed to mention that Hal Clement has a new novel coming out from Del Rey this spring. It is titled *Still River*, and I'm sure it

will have a major impact on the field when it is released.

Speaking of books, I also am glad to see that you have picked up Darrell Schweitzer as your reviewer. I have always enjoyed Darrell's writing and find his unique rating system quite easy to follow.

And, speaking of Hal Clement, "The Home System" sound great. I may take up your challenge and try writing a story set in it. But what I'd really like to see is your prevail upon Hal to put his disciplined imagination to work and give us a story set on Janus. I quit signed John Taylor's "The Phoenix Riddle," and was very impressed by Bob Eggleton's art (thanks for giving us full-color interiors).

The other fiction in the issue was quite well-done, including my favorite of the issue, Orson Scott Card's "Prior Restraint." I hope you continue to find such highly entertaining stories.

Of the other magazine features, my reactions range from antipathy to great approval. I'm not a big movie fan, so Jessie Horsting's column doesn't really interest me. I'd have rather seen another story, but I suppose that other readers' opinions differ from my own, so I could not complain bitterly. I do with less "Continued to be," but understand the exigencies of magazine publishing often require such sacrifices. Your alien publisher seems quite opinionated, but also quite entertaining. I hope the editor is as vocal about SF. The last item I'd like to comment on is the Reader's Service you are offering. Bravo! If Darrell excites our interest in a book we know exactly where to turn to find it. No more hunting through fifty different bookstores asking for a book and being met by the puzzled reply, "Theodore Who?" Congratulations.

Finally, I'd like to thank you for a very well-done first issue, and wish you good luck in producing many, many more.

Best,

Tim Fitzgibbons, Massachusetts

Dear *Aboriginal SF*,

I would like to order one of the books reviewed in your first issue, *Godbody* by Theodore Sturgeon.

Thanks so much for making the books you review and advertise available in this way. I am a paraplegic, confined to a wheelchair and don't often have the opportunity to go to bookstores. I have read *SF* nearly exclusively for 25 years — all mail order.

Thanks for adding your service, which will broaden my horizons.

Sincerely,

David L. Smelley, Texas

-ABO-

Aborigines

(Continued from page 5)

people in Seattle, Washington, where he makes his home.



Greg Cox
at work

His previous sales include "The Homework Horror" to *Amazing*. He attended Clarion West in 1984 and was quickly ostracized (we assume) for introducing necrophilia limericks (at least he says that was the worst thing he did there). Some of his favorite writers include George R. R. Martin and Suzy McKee Charnas.

The illustration for Greg's story in this issue, "Almost 11," was done by Carol Ann Gaffney, who operates a sign shop with her husband.



Carol Ann Gaffney
a self portrait

A science fiction fan, she attended the Butlers School of Art in Boston and currently is studying at the University of Massachusetts in Boston.

Louie Thelug was born in Ovid, N.Y., but felt the call of the West Coast while still in his early twenties. He moved to Venice, Calif., and promptly took up roller skating.

He has written three short stories to date, using the pseudonym "Isaac Asimov." His first novel, ten years in the making, is due out in 1992. It will explore the intriguing realm of mud life, and is part of a dekalogy. He has already completed outlines for the nine sequels.

When he is not writing, Louie works for IRS, where he specializes in hunting down questionable deductions by science fiction writers.

With fourth wife, Yolanda, he shares a love of yoga, yogurt, and yodeling. He also enjoys reading air conditioning and refrigeration manuals, and personals.

Cortney Skinner, who did the cover for the first issue of *Aboriginal SF*, has also illustrated Louie's story, "Quantum Leap."

Cortney lives in Arlington, Mass., and lets Mr.



Cortney Skinner

Ed answer his phone. Call him, if you don't believe us.

Participants in the recent World Science Fiction Convention in Atlanta, Ga., flock to an auction to benefit the widow of well-known science fiction writer Manly Wade Wellman, who died in 1981. *What Dreams May Write* and *The Lost and the Lurking*, among others, and was nominated for a Pulitzer prize in 1988.

Wellman died last spring leaving bills behind. Harlan Ellison was auctioneer for items that included autographed books and scripts, a cup once owned by Edgar Allan Poe, and the item which brought in the highest bid, a Stephen King notebook.



Harlan Ellison

In 3 and 1/2 hours, the auction raised \$28,300. Anyone wishing to contribute further to this good cause can write to Richard Gilliam, 309 Gilliam Road, Gurley, Alabama, 35748. Checks should be made out to Frances Wellman.

A 30-year retrospective of Ellison's work is due out in time for Christmas.

The Essential Ellison contains several thousand pages and some stories never before published.

Ellison has also sold a television series to CBS. The hour-long program, called *Dark Forces*, is presently in development.



James Morrow

James Morrow's new hardcover book, *This Is The Way The World Ends*, has been getting critical acclaim. He has also just sold a story to the television show *Twilight Zone*.

Called "The Assemblage of Kristen," it's based on one of his short stories published a few years back.

Artist Helen Shapiro of Cambridge, Mass., says she has just done a cover for *Telecommunications* magazine and for the book *Dreams of an Unseen Planet* by Theresa Flomwright.



Helen Shapiro

Shapiro, a friend of Ron and Val Lakey Lindahn, has been a professional artist since 1981 and illustrated covers for DAW, Tor, and Dell Books. She used to do mostly fantasy art, but finds herself switching to more science fiction and hardware illustration these days.

Marion Zimmer Bradley has just finished a novel about the Trojan War for Simon and Schuster and Pocketbook Paperbacks called *Firebrand*.

She's also completed a new Darkover novel coming out in 1987 for DAW, called *Heirs of Hammerfell*. Seven of her Darkover novels have now been sold for publication in Japan.

She says that during the first three weeks of September she had a marvelous time leading a lecture tour of magical sites in Britain.

The idea for the tour came from James George, the owner of an occult book store in Glastonbury, England, who helped her research her bestseller *Mists of Avalon* which was set in Arthurian England.

Her newest collection of short stories, *The Best of Marion Zimmer Bradley*, is a great read.

Kiel Stuart, a fellow Long Islander from Stony Brook, New York, tells us that his self-portrait is being widely exhibited, most recently at the Self Portrait Invitational Show at Mills Pond House in St. James, New York.

Stuart is also an author, and has stories forthcoming in the Andre Norton/Robert Adams Magic in Ink anthology and Norton's *Witch World* anthology.

Balancing brawn and brains, Stuart's avid hobby is power lifting/bodybuilding. Now we're waiting to hear word of how he did as a competitor in Pulp Press International's Three Day Novel contest over the Labor Day weekend.

Paul Preuss has a hit in his latest novel, *Human Error*, about computer engineering at the cellular level.

He has just signed a contract to do a series of books for Avon, as yet untitled, sponsored by Arthur

C. Clarke.

It all came about in this fashion: Preuss was once inspired to create a computer game for Spinnaker based on a Clarke story called "Breaking Strain," a lifeboat tale where only one of two men in a spaceship can survive.

The game is lying dormant for now in a market gone soft. As he puts it, "The market for computer games is mostly 28-year-old computer nerds. And there are only so many out there and they can only play so many games a month."

But the detective character he developed, who solves the puzzle of who survived and why and goes on to other space mysteries, will be the protagonist in the one or more books Preuss will write for the series.

Preuss is also finishing up a novel for Tor called *Starfire*, due out in the Spring of 1988.

Preuss is recently back from "a sabbatical from the club" in which he took some time off from science fiction writing.

Preuss says there is an enormous pressure within the science fiction field to conform to certain styles once you have written a way. The pressure comes from editors, who are thinking about sales, and fans, who sometimes like to poison a writer.

He says he's learned to keep some distance now and it helps him write what he wants to.



Steven R. Boyett

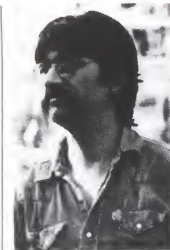
Steven R. Boyett, author of the Berkeley paperback, *The Architect of Sleep*, is upset that the publisher failed to note that the book is the first in a series. The novel, about an alternate world in which raccoons with opposable thumbs have evolved and risen to dominance, ends with several story lines unresolved.

Boyett says he's been getting some heat from readers who are upset at the lack of an ending in an otherwise entertaining book. He's been passing the heat on to his publisher.

The poem "Icarian" is the work of Robert Frazier, whose poems have appeared in many SF magazines and lately the anthologies *Songs From Unsung Worlds*, edited by Bonnie Gordon (Severus and Birkhauser Books) and *Afterlives*, edited by Pamela Sargent and Ian Watson.

His second poetry collection, *Perception Barriers* (Berkeley Poets Workshop and Press), is due out late this year.

David Lunde's "Einstein's Cold Equation Blues" ought to ring some



David Lunde

familiar bells for SF fans.

Lunde is a professor of English at SUNY at Fredonia. That means when he is not reading and writing science fiction and fantasy, he is, in his words, "trying to convince post-adolescents that homesickness and puppy love are not the stuff of poetry."

-ABO-

Moving?

We expect our subscribers to move every once in a while — after all, look how much our alien publisher moves about. So move all you want, but if you don't write to tell us where you've gone, we won't be able to send you the next issue. Please enclose your current address label.

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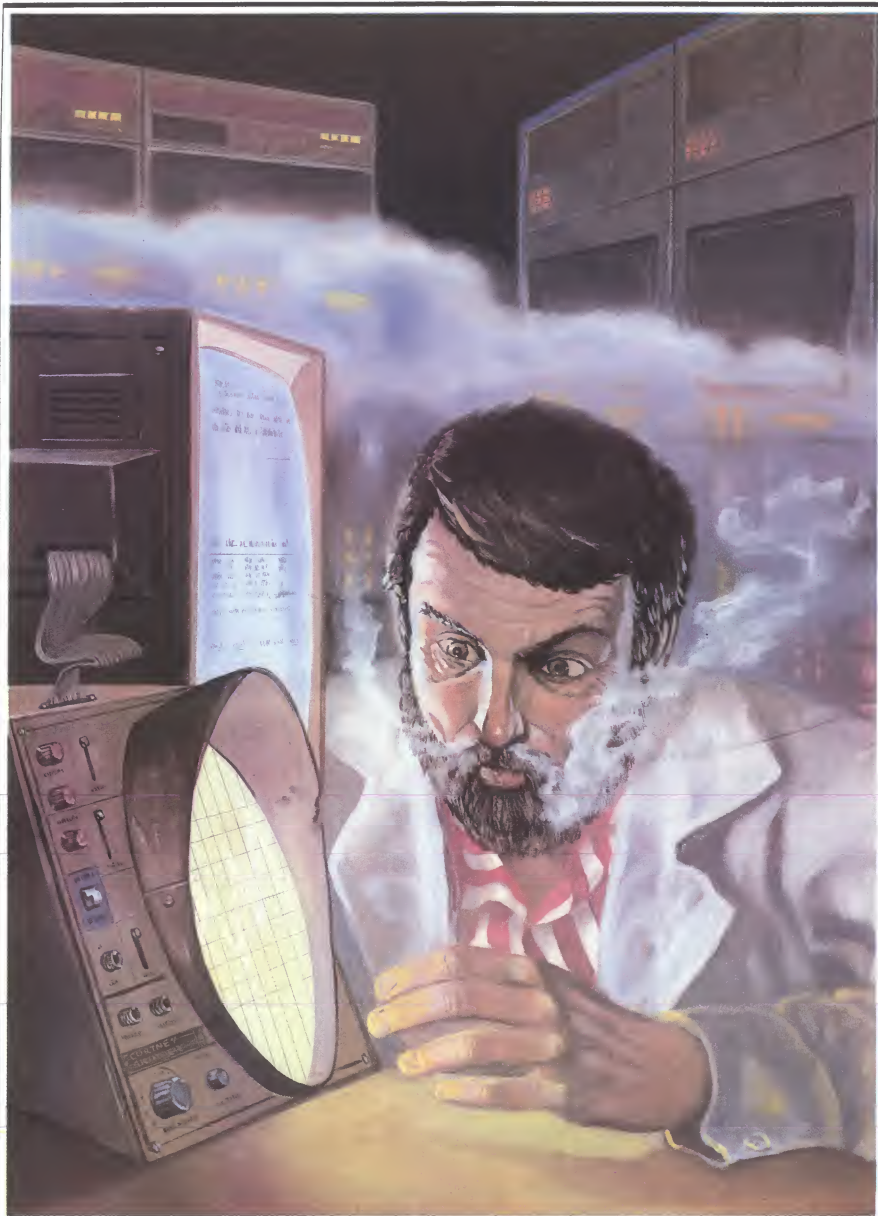
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Art by Courtney Skinner

Quantum Leap

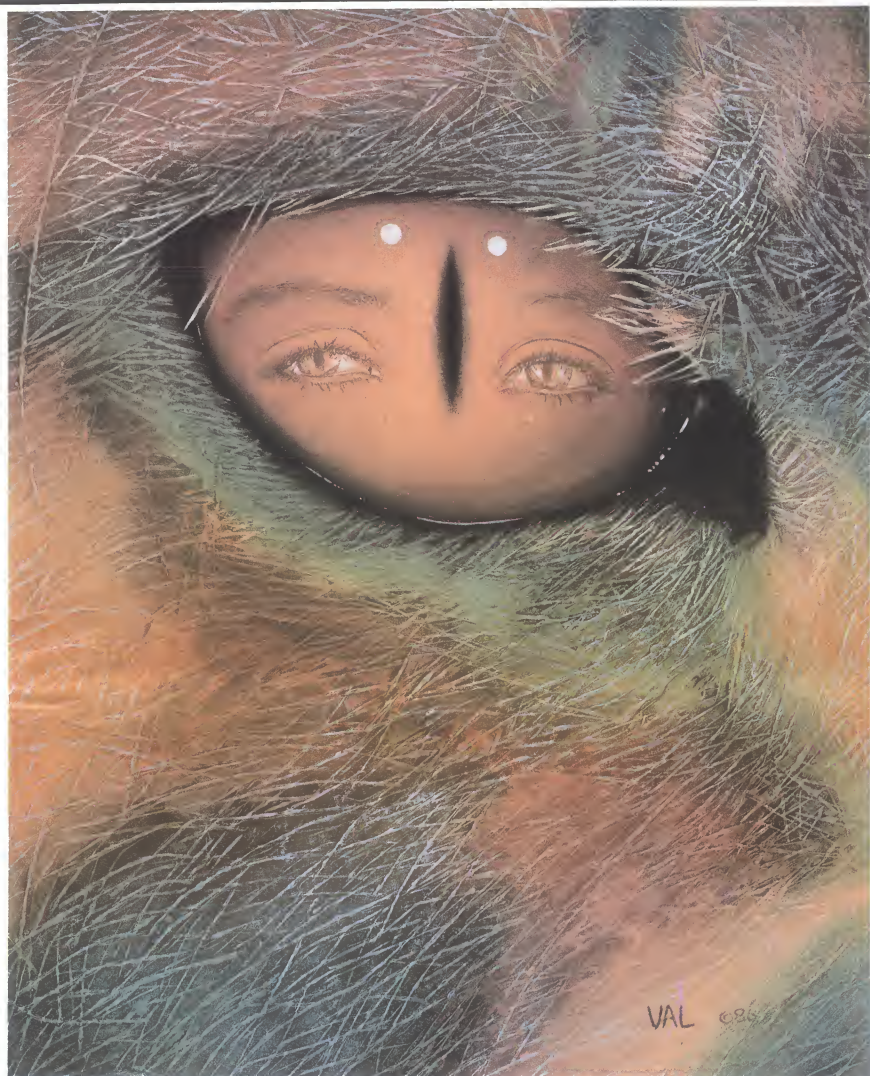
By Louie Thelug

"Can't we go someplace warmer?"
 "In a minute, Harry. I want to show you something first. Watch while I run this baby through its paces."

"Sure," I said, shivering. I needed a shot of Irish badly. Morning-after shakes or just freezing? Fog flowed over the sides of the liquid helium tank. I should have dressed warmer.

"Can't you hurry it up a bit, Phil?" I never

(Continued to page 30)



Art by Val Lakey Lindahn

Second Best Friend

By Elizabeth Anne Hull

*And indeed, there will be time . . .
There will be time to murder and create*

These words, written by a poet a full century before, fascinated Lolly. She knew they were written a hundred years ago because Myra had said so in her completely truthful voice.

Lolly understood what the words meant literally, and yet she knew — because Myra had told her — that she did not yet appreciate their full significance.

"Why does Eliot think there will be 'time to murder and create', Myra?" Lolly had asked when she first heard the poem.

"Never confuse the poet with the speaker of the words in a poem. Remember that it's a monologue, an interior monologue, with the speaker speaking to himself. He's a man in conflict with himself, wanting two mutually exclusive things, and he can't decide which. It's often the human condition, you know, and people are always afraid they'll run out of time."

"Okay, I know I have a lot to learn about that, but why time to *murder and create*?"

"Why do you *think*?" Myra had a frustrating habit of answering questions with another question. But Lolly didn't have an answer to Myra's question. She supposed that Myra asked a question when *she* couldn't think of an answer, either.

Lolly never lied; she'd never learned how to, had never really wanted to, and perhaps was in-

(Continued to next page)

(Continued from previous page)

capable of it. But when she couldn't think of answers she often changed the subject, just to keep a conversation going. "I never want to murder anybody. But I do want time to create something wonderful one day."

"Prufrock is a kind of melodramatic personality. He thinks he's a sensitive, cultivated gentleman, but he's a lot more sensitive toward himself than he is toward anyone else. Maybe he means the word *murder* metaphorically, Lolly. Killing his love for his beloved, killing his own feeling could be a kind of murder."

"You mean sometimes we have to destroy something in order to build something better?"

"Perhaps *Eliot* means something like that. A good poem makes you think. A great poem is one that has more to tell you than you can discover just hearing it once. It can mean something to someone else that was never conceived by the poet, and that's all right as long as the new meanings build on the poet's intention."

"But you said the poet's intentions can never really be known for sure," Lolly pointed out.

Myra gave Lolly one of her quizzical looks. "I believe I love you most when you're precocious, Lollypup." Lolly wasn't exactly sure what the word *precocious* meant, but she recognized the tone of approval. "Nevertheless," Myra said, "the author's intentions are important to try to discover, because a thoughtful person tries to decide whether to agree or disagree with the writer's viewpoint."

As she walked alone now in the early morning along the beach, watching the incoming tide catch and erase her footprints into the sand of the sad love song. Individual lines haunted her.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?

I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk along the beach.

The idea of Lolly's parting her hair anywhere and wearing white flannel trousers was simply absurd. She tried to imagine herself eating a peach. Why should peach-eating be daring? Sometimes she picked up pretty peach-colored coral from the beach, and she'd sand. She had brought one gorgeous spig back to the cabin a week ago, the day they had arrived on Dunk Island, and laid it in the sun to dry. Myra said it would bleach out in the sun and eventually become white. Sure enough, when Lolly looked at it this morning, it was already losing its color, becoming more golden, less peachy pink. Myra said the coral was fragile, though it looked so hard. She said that once the coral had formed a Great Barrier that stretched along the coast for more than 200 kilometers, but it had been destroyed by a tiny starfish called the Crown of Thorns. It didn't seem possible, but Myra had said it without the slightest smell of a lie. She also said that the starfish was just a dumb animal trying to survive, but it too nearly suffered extinction once it had killed off its food supply. She reminded Lolly of the story of the goose that laid the golden egg.

Lolly loved eggs but didn't really care for peaches. Still, she did have an open mind on the subject of new taste experiences. Just yesterday morning Myra had given her something she'd concocted herself — sort of chocolate-coated, lambchop-flavored M&M. The combination would taste better than it sounded, Myra claimed, and she chortled with glee when Lolly agreed and gobbled down a dozen.

"I knew you'd like it. I'll make you some more," she promised. She was always pleased when one of her experiments worked the way she intended. Of course, some of them, Myra said herself, were "real booms."

A sweet-sad feeling of enjoying something that soon had to end suffused Lolly's mood this morning. Even before the telegram arrived yesterday afternoon, Myra had been talking about the possibility that this vacation in the far northern winter warmth might be one of their last chances to explore the world away from the vicinity of Toowoomba, where they did most of their work.

It was hard to say exactly how things were different after the telegram. They weren't going home any earlier than they had originally planned. They would be in Toowoomba tomorrow afternoon, right on schedule. Last night Lolly had cuddled next to Myra as usual, allowing Myra to take comfort from her warmth, as Lolly took her own pleasure just from the

wonderful smells of Myra. It was surprising how chilly the nights became this far north into the tropics. The ubiquitous *Belladonna* slept with them, as always, at Myra's feet, curled into a calico ball, also trying to take comfort from their combined animal warmth.

Myra had been crying on and off for several hours by the time they retired for the evening. She blew her nose hard into the last snowy white tissue in the box.

"I hate to cry," she said between sobs. "It doesn't do any good. I know I'll have a terrible headache later. But the tears well up when I'm frustrated and I don't know what to do. You think I can do anything, don't you? But there's so much beyond my control. I'm not God."

Lolly didn't believe in God, but she thought it better not to remind Myra of that fact just then. She only nodded and blinked her soulful eyes. Myra liked it better when she talked, but, being only five years old, Lolly couldn't always come up with cheerful things to say. Sometimes the things she said intended to comfort Myra only made her cry harder.

Myra's tears hurt Lolly even more because she herself could never cry. She just wasn't created that way. Lolly did understand what Myra meant by frustration. There were so many things she wanted to do, to know, that were beyond her. Money, for instance. The thing was all about money, of course, as it nearly always was when Myra cried.

"Now they've gone beyond anything Father ever feared," Myra sobbed. "They couldn't work together to save the reef and they still haven't got a workable nuclear arms limitation agreement and yet they all can get together to ban genetic engineering. All of our work, it just isn't fair!" And then she sobbed again and couldn't speak aloud either. At times like this, Lolly instinctively put her head in Myra's lap and allowed Myra to take comfort from stroking her.

Lolly did understand some things about money. Myra worked with the theater, and when Floyd's university support and government grants were cut off, so were Myra's. Myra would almost certainly have to move to Brisbane and discontinue field work. On a simple level, they needed money to pay for food, travel, the cabin, equipment for experiments. Myra devoted her whole life to her experiments.

Just before the telegram came, Myra had been happily working on an experiment with Lolly. She was testing Lolly's eyes with a chartful of arrows pointing in all directions. Myra had designed it herself, she said, because none of those in use really would do for Lolly.

"I think you may be just about ready to learn to read," Myra said when they finished. "When we get home day after tomorrow, we'll start your reading lessons. I've been working on the design for a page-turner that you can just press with your nose. Would you like to read 'The Ugly Duckling' for yourself, my little swan?"

What heaven it would be if Lolly could read a story or a poem for herself! How many things she could find out! The whole idea was magical to Lolly, even though she could see that Myra and Floyd read without apparent effort. She very much doubted that she could ever make any sense of the squiggles and worms that crawled across the pages. And seeing the misery reading could sometimes cause Myra, Lolly wondered whether she'd be better off not knowing how. Still, if Myra wanted to teach her to read and thought she could learn, Lolly would try her hardest to do it. She'd do almost anything to please Myra.

Walking past the jetty on the beach, Lolly considered taking one of the small motorboats that Myra had taught her to operate during the past week, but today she wasn't in the mood for the artificiality of motors.

Myra promised, Lolly might also learn to drive a car on land, but Lolly hoped that day would not be very soon. She liked to please Myra, but some of Myra's dreams frightened her a little. Myra knew as well as Lolly did how many people died driving cars, yet Myra didn't seem afraid of the danger, at least not enough to prevent her from driving anyway. Lolly was always amazed at how illogically bold people could be at times. Myra said there was a fine line between boldness and bravery, and an even finer distinction between bravery and true courage.

"I think you have a quality human beings rarely have," Lolly said. "The ability to weigh it out, measure both risks and gains and decide to act or not." Lolly hoped Myra was right about her. She knew Myra believed it, or she

wouldn't have said it.

On impulse Lolly threw herself into the calm Coral Sea and swam toward the littleisle just 300 meters offshore called Purtaboi — remember Pretty Boy, Myra said. Pretty Boy: the image made Lolly snigger inside. Girls were pretty. Boys were snuggly and snuggly and purringly tails. She didn't like the idea one bit! Not that Lolly had ever known many boys. Lolly regarded boys as creatures far inferior to girls, almost a subspecies, though Myra said there were five times as many boys as girls in the world. And she said it in her perfectly honest voice so it had to be true. Myra would know about such things. The few boys she'd talked to smelled aggressive and acted silly and unstable, which made Lolly nervous. She was glad Myra sheltered her from the world, if it was indeed full of unpredictable boys.

Myra had a generally calming effect on Lolly. It would be more fun now if Myra were here to toss the frisbee and let Lolly swim after it. It was always better to have a goal and it was always more fun to do things together with Myra. Lolly was never a loner by choice. Very often without Myra went away and left Lolly, but this morning was rare in that Lolly had gone off on her own without Myra. She was beginning to regret it, too.

She had nearly swum to the sharp coral fringes of the isle. Here the coral was alive and beginning to grow again, not just pink, but yellow, blue, green, a whole rainbow of colors under the clear shallow water. Lolly thought it was exquisitely lovely, but she remembered Myra's warning that even a tiny scratch from the coral could produce a vicious infection.

Abruptly, she turned and headed back toward shore. There would no fresh water and so few forms of life except birds, snails, and aquatic animals — perhaps one of the comic frill-necked lizards worth chasing for amusement, but certainly no one to talk to — and Lolly wanted to talk this morning. Some things about the poem were nagging at her.

Coming out of the water she shook herself all over in the way that always made Myra laugh. She wondered whether Myra could see her.

Sure enough, as she bounded toward the beach-front cabin, she saw Myra looking out the window. Myra waved, and then she was just finishing breakfast dishes. The dark-ringed puffiness around her eyes was replaced by the familiar warm, crinkly smile lines. How she loved Myra!

Belladonna (who hated water, either soapy or salty, but still liked her company for how-knew-what-reasons-a-cat-might-have) curled herself at a ray of sunshine and watched them through cautiously slitted eyes as they settled down on the porch.

"See you can hold that in your grubby little paws without spilling," Myra said, handing her a cup of warm bouillon while she herself sat on the porch steps with steaming jasmine tea. *Belladonna* eyed them both with indifferent interest. Perhaps she was hoping to get Lolly's leftovers. Myra smiled as Lolly lifted her cup to her mouth to sip.

"You hardly spill at all anymore when you drink out of a cup."

"I saw at least one lobster in the trap as I swam in." Lolly changed the subject to hide her embarrassment at the praise. "I don't know why Prufrock would want to be a 'pair of ragged calves, scuttling across the floors of sillies.'"

"When I was very little, even younger than you, I heard one of my older sisters, I don't even remember now which one, say to my mother, 'I'll eat worms and die, and when you'll be sorry.' It never occurred to any of us that she would die before us. We assume there's a natural order, but it's forever being upset, and things don't always go on as they die before."

"I'm still puzzled about J. Alfred's mermaids," Lolly persisted. She absently sipped her cup on the porch floor for *Belladonna*. Daintily the cat sauntered over, sniffed at it, and walked back to her ray of sunshine, where she curled up again. "Remember when you read to me about the little mermaid from Hans Christian Andersen? She was doomed to love the human man but would have to decide to live in the sea and all her life there if she wanted to live with him for just a brief time. When you read me that story, you said that quality of life was just as important as quantity." Myra nodded but didn't interrupt.

"When J. Alfred says he hears the mermaids singing, each to each, I think he means he knows they will sing to him. Must a love song

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Art by Val Lakey Lindahn

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always be sad, Myra?"

"Just off hand I can't think of any that aren't sad. There must be some. But love songs are usually about missed opportunities. You're good at catching feelings, Lolly. You're better at hearing and smelling emotions than any mechanical lie detector ever devised. I think Eliot meant it to feel sad."

"I feel sad too, but maybe not for the same reasons. I think it's different for Andersen's little mermaid. The prince didn't know what sacrifices the mermaid had to make to stay with him. He truly loved her. But J. Alfred is not in love with the mermaids at all. He wishes one of them would love him, but he loves one of the human women in the room where they come and go, talking of Michelangelo."

"Ah, but he's afraid of telling her that he loves her. In literature it seems the hero must always risk losing something important in order to gain anything worth having."

"What has he got to lose if he says he loves her and she laughs at him? He hasn't got her anyway and he never will if he doesn't try."

"Nothing but something very human, dignity."

Dignity was something as insubstantial to Lolly as God.

"I think it is better for the mermaids if they do not love J. Alfred. I wouldn't love him, either."

"Not all literature shows the world the way it should be, Lolly." Myra poured more hot water into the same tea leaves and they watched them float again briefly, then gently settle.

"Is Prufrock's love song a warning?"

Myra looked at her in that odd, speculative way she sometimes had. "You're so bright that sometimes I forget how literal-minded you can be. You've got a fine memory and that's the basis for a fine mind. You just lack experience, and I'm beginning to see that until you can read, your experiences will be limited by your own body no matter how many stimulating sights and sounds and smells and tastes you're exposed to." She brushed the shaggy hair from Lolly's eyes. "One day soon, I believe you'll start to see the

connections between things. Maybe you're already beginning to see them. We can't expect you to follow Piaget exactly, can we? You're my best hope for the future, you know. Meanwhile, let's enjoy our last full day on Dunk Island. Do you want to go over to New Colony and socialize?"

"Not really." Lolly knew Myra wanted to go, but she also knew she was really being given the choice. There were lots of boys and young men there. "Let's just stay on our own side of the island till we have to leave."

They looked up the beach at the ruins of what had once been a family resort. It had been abandoned at least a decade before when newer, more luxurious accommodations were built on the other side of the island, as if to keep people looking toward the continent instead of eastward toward the no longer flourishing reefs. Their little cabin, one of the closest to the beach, still had running water and its own ancient generator and electricity lines left. There was no reason to go to the expense of pulling them out when, soon enough, the rain forest would absorb everything without trace.

"When we get home, Lolly, we won't be going any further than Brisbane for a while, I'm afraid. But I think Father will have some ideas about your education at the university."

Lolly had been to Brisbane many times with Myra. She didn't much care for the big city.

"But you'll still work with me, too?"

"Of course, even if I have to do it on my own time." She looked at Lolly's worried face. "Hey, I won't let the university give you to CURB." She picked up her cup and rinsed it in the sink. "You know, while you were off exploring this morning, I heard a weather forecast from the mainland. It may be that atmospheric conditions will be right and we'll see Papilio Ulysses today without having to climb Mt. Kootaloo."

"Who?" Lolly broke in.

"Oh, it's just a rare blue butterfly that lives in the rain forest most of the time. It only lives seven days, and comes down out of the forest only under certain atmospheric conditions. It's supposed to be a very good omen when it comes down to sea level. Let's keep our eyes open for it. Come on, our grant proposal says we're here of-

ficially to exploit sensory stimulations. Let's go to Muggy-Muggy, and to hell with world committees that can work better together against improving the world than they can in preserving us from blowing ourselves to smithereens!"

They ignored the beach right in front of them and trotted off together on the trail through the edge of the rain forest toward the secluded strip of sand that seemed, somehow, more precious for its inaccessibility, leaving Belladonna behind on the cabin porch, finally interested in the bouillon left in Lolly's cup when no one was there to watch her.

The trail to Muggy-Muggy took them through parts of the old camp, past graves marking the early settlers of the island, across a precarious bridge, up and down gullies. When they finally reached the beach, Lolly and Myra loped along together half a kilometer before the sandy beach ended abruptly in a pebbly, rocky shore. Lolly never minded the stones — her feet were nicely padded with calluses — but Myra was a tenderfoot, even wearing sandals. When Myra flopped down in the sand, Lolly came back and snuggled next to her. Lolly was panting and Myra sweated profusely.

Lolly didn't want to mention anything about the previous day that might start Myra crying again, but she said, "I'm glad to see you feel better this morning."

"Yes, a good night's sleep puts everything in perspective. Father always says the worst disasters can have beneficial side effects. He's hopeful that when CURB achieves its ultimate goals the weight of the bureaucracy will have to find a new *raison d'être*. He says it's happened before, before I was born. When my grandparents were children back in America, they had a plague called polio, a dread crippler of children up to the middle of the last century. They formed an organization called the Mothers' March of Dimes to raise money for research. When they succeeded in finding a vaccine to prevent polio, the organization shifted its efforts to fighting other diseases rather than disband the fundraising network they had established. Later Grandma became one of the ad-

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ministrators of the March of Dimes. Grandpa suffered from another disease, tobacco addiction, which killed many more people than polio ever did. So naturally, she helped to sway the others to concentrate on eradicating polio. They finally succeeded, but not before Grandpa developed emphysema. That's why Grannie brought our family to Australia, to get away from the pollution. The March of Dimes organization still exists now, but you don't hear much about them since they shifted their efforts to eradicating polio and smoking in less than a decade.

"It's great to know that a single person can make such a difference to the world," Lolly said. "Not to mention how different your life would be if you still lived in America. And mine."

"Individuals make a difference," Myra agreed. "But so do institutions. They take on a life of their own, and it's not always all good or all bad. The Cultural Union on Reproduction Bureau originally had a pretty worthwhile purpose, uniting all the technologically advanced countries to cope with the crisis of the overpopulation of boys compared to girls. When the technology was developed to let people choose the sex of their children before conception, it didn't take too long to expose the hypocrisy most people mouthed when they said they valued boys and girls equally. Even when the problem became apparent — and it didn't take twenty years before it did — most people seemed to think it was a good idea for everyone else to have girls, while they still opted for boys themselves. If CURB hadn't been formed, I probably wouldn't have been allowed to attend the university, no matter what exams I could pass. As it is, I still feel pressured all the time to get married and make babies."

"Are you going to have any babies, ever?"

"Well, perhaps one day. But not because I owe it to society. First, I want to find the right father. That is, I want to marry someone I love who would also make a good father. I wouldn't want to marry someone like Floyd."

"Why marry at all? Why not just pick a man that will give you strong children?"

"Lolly, there's such a lot you have to learn about adult human behavior. I wouldn't want to have a child without being married. Children need two parents if at all possible. I don't appreciate that more than most people. My mother died having Ellie when I was just seven years old."

"Oh, Myra, surely your mother didn't intend to leave you half orphaned?"

"No, I'm certain she didn't. But we can't always do everything we want to. I don't think she really planned to have another baby after me. There are only three or four years between each of us older girls. I sometimes wonder how Ellie must have been affected when she got old enough to realize that her birth had something to do with Mother's death. The rest of us have tried hard never to let her feel that we hold it against her." She looked at Lolly with a smile. "Let's hope she isn't as good at reading true feelings as you are. I don't think Floyd has ever forgiven her."

"But your babies would be good ones, Myra. Your babies could help make the world a better place to live in for everyone."

"Human babies, more than any other species, can be influenced by environment, no matter what their genetic material. I don't want to compromise by marrying a man I don't love just to give my potential children a good father, like my three older sisters. My sisters are all smart women, but social pressure can be stronger than laws. I suppose the world would say they've made good marriages. They're economically well off, and their dull husbands don't beat them or their kids. But I don't envy them their future as their children grow up."

"I see what you mean. There must be more to life than just making babies," Lolly agreed. "I would be just as bad as me about your life in milk or diapers as in coffee and eggs."

"And I certainly don't want to pick a man to father my child just because he appeals to my chemistry, as Ellie did. Ron just couldn't deny all the other women his company, since they all found him just as irresistible as my poor baby sister did. He still keeps her in the garage, poor thing, coming down from Darwin maybe once a year to make sure she doesn't succumb to the charms of any of a dozen other men that would court her at Dalby. I guess she's happy enough now with the cow and the garden and the farm-

house, but it's a life that would make me crazy. I think I would be a little queer in the head if I hadn't had a chance to go to school and get away from the drudgery of 'women's work.'"

"And it wouldn't be any better to 'come and go,' talking of Michelangelo," would it," Lolly said. She liked it very much when Myra talked to her about things that mattered deeply to her.

"Back in America," Myra continued, "it didn't get past a Supreme Court test, but before it was challenged, their Congress had passed a law, so-called 'for the good of everyone,' that no girls could be trained for any occupation that would interrupt childbearing when Myries like to think we're so independent that we'd never tolerate such a law, of course, but I know many people here were just waiting to see how it would go there."

"The court had upheld it there, you can bet it would have been tried here, too. People are people, and human nature is probably the same everywhere. Those who have power want to keep it. But political power sometimes comes to weak and selfish people. When Father was a boy, women were still the majority and yet they held all political power in proportion to their numbers. Ironically, women's true potential strength is only now beginning to be appreciated, when we're such a pitiful minority in numbers. Sometimes, it seems, a situation has to get very much worse before it gets any better."

Myra picked up a handful of sand and let it run through her fingers slowly. She didn't seem to notice that Lolly wasn't talking again. Lolly was amazed at how different each grain looked when she examined the sand closely. Some of the particles were actually broken shells or fragments of coral.

"Oh, I was small," Myra said dreamily. "I didn't realize that Father thought girls were insignificant. I thought he just didn't like children, since he ignored all five of us equally. It wasn't till I was in my teens and the gender imbalance was becoming recognized as a world crisis in the developed countries that I began to wonder how differently I might have been raised if one of my sisters had been a boy. Then I began to worry, had the breakthrough in sexing had come just a few years earlier, whether Floyd would have chosen to have just a single son instead of five daughters. He was fighting social pressure himself at that time in having so many children. Now, of course, since there are so few women of childbearing age, he looks like a hero in retrospect. But I don't think he would have urged me to sit for the university entrance exams if he had a son to pin his hopes on."

Lolly wondered whether Myra was aware that she called her father by his given name when she was trying not to be bitter. It was not difficult at all to read Myra's emotions. Lolly felt sure Myra could do most of the same tricks. Lolly did, even without Myra's acute sense of smell, if she watched herself and other people as closely as Lolly did.

"But now I believe Father's happy with me," Myra continued after a long pause. "Anyway I'm glad I'm me. I wouldn't want to have to fight the odds of five to one to get a date, much less a spouse. It's rather nice in a way to be a scarce commodity."

Lolly lay back on the sand. She couldn't tell Myra everything she thought without sounding disloyal. But she was grateful that Floyd had been able to control everything, too. Myra was gentler with her than Floyd was. Lolly feared Floyd more and obeyed him without question. But she thought of Myra as her own, her "significant other." To please her Lolly would try any experiment Myra could dream up, even dangerous ones.

"Hey, what do you say we teach you how to build a sandcastle today, Lolly?"

"Only if you tell me a story." Since Myra had given her the choice of not going to the other side of the island to socialize, she certainly now owed it to her to do whatever Myra wanted, but she liked to tease her. Besides, Myra liked to tell stories.

Myra said, "Come on, here's your chance to create something. All creators need to practice." She began digging into the soft sand, down to the cool, cooler, wetter sand. Lolly couldn't resist something that looked like so much fun and began to help dig and pile up a heap of the damp sand that Myra could use to construct their castle.

"All right, once upon a time . . ." Myra paused and worked a moment before going on. "Maybe it'll be better if you do the excavating of

building materials and let me do the construction." Lolly wagged her tail to let Myra know that was fine with her and continued digging.

"Once upon a time, over twenty-five years ago" — that might have been a million years to Lolly — "there was a collie who was very much like your great-great-great grandfather." Lolly wagged her tail and dug some more sand for Myra to work into shapes.

"Though he had a fine pedigree, he wasn't considered a handsome dog at all because his nose wasn't pointed enough and the space between his eyes was too wide. Fortunately, this was an indication that his skull was large enough for a great big brain."

"What was his name?"

"He was known as Fido to his friends, which means 'faithful,' and he had many other good qualities, too. Among them, devotion to his human companion, a man very much like my father."

Lolly continued to dig up wet sand, thinking about the word "companion." Lolly particularly liked the fairy tale called "The Travelling Companion." Myra had explained that the story was a religious allegory — something to do with God — but Lolly had never really grasped what people saw in their concept of God.

She could understand quite readily why anyone would worship and want to serve a superior being. Myra had read some of Plato's dialogues to her. Plato said all men will seek the good. They don't know what it is, but they do, that described her relationship with Myra perfectly. And though Belladonna couldn't speak, except in the most primitive sounds, it was clear that she also loved Myra. Lolly could see the pattern. The weaker mind should always rely on someone stronger than herself. Myra's voice brought her sharply back to the story.

"And so," she was saying, "after only twenty years of genetic manipulation, Floyd bred a bitch puppy that looked mostly like a long-haired Great Dane, though she had the bloodlines of a dozen different breeds. And she could indeed talk."

Lolly didn't want to let Myra know that her mind had wandered and she'd missed a good part of the story. "Was she the only dog in the world who could talk?"

"Yes, and so far as I know she was the first one anywhere in the world who spoke any human language. Floyd had to work with her for two years before she began to speak in sentences. None of the others in her litter ever spoke, though they lived very long. That was the year, 2005, when CURB reached agreement in all the nations that matter technologically to stop any further genetic manipulation and research on recombinant DNA. Zelda was unusual, too, in that she didn't come into heat until she was nearly five years old, which is very late for dogs, even large ones. Lucky for you, Lollypup, Zelda did live long enough to take a fancy to a wandering dingo, sort of an experiment of her own, and bore a litter of puppies before she died."

The words "lucky for you" sent a thrill down Lolly's spine. Myra told this story with her not-true, not-false voice, which excited Lolly even more, making the fur on her hindquarters fluff up. What parts were true? What parts were made up? Lolly could tell that Myra believed some of it, but what part was imaginary, like God, that she could ignore? She wished she knew what Myra was trying to tell her. It did no good to ask her to be more direct when she smelled neither make believe nor entirely truthful.

"And what happened to Zelda's puppies?" Lolly urged.

"Five of the oddest doggies you would ever want to see. The first-born was weak, even weaker than his mother, and he died a few hours after he was born, before he ever was named. Tom, the next one, was strong but mean, and though Floyd was sure he was capable of speech, he was declared autistic by CURB. CURB finally insisted he be caged in the laboratory or destroyed. He's still alive, I hear, but I haven't seen him for over four years."

"Dick, the third one, was promised to one of Floyd's colleagues at the University of Budapest. He may still be alive for all we know. Harry, the fourth, was extremely smart but didn't talk and he was put out herding sheep. Last I heard from Ellie, he's still alive, too." Myra twined her fingers through Lolly's thick fur around her neck. "The fifth puppy learned to

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talk like her mother and had the strength and courage of the cur who sired her." She paused dramatically while she formed a small spire, then concluded, "And she was the best puppy that ever lived."

Lolly felt confusing emotions at the ending of the story. Jealousy was not exactly the right word; being jealous of the puppy in the story was like worshipping God. How could she get upset over someone imaginary? Myra was apparently absorbed in making correlations around the sandcastle, but she looked up and gave Lolly one of those speculative looks.

Lolly had to admit to herself she did feel jealousy about Belladonna. Myra got angry sometimes when the cat broke her training and used a corner of the dining room behind the drapes instead of her box of cat pebbles as a hint that it didn't meet her fastidious standards. But all Myra did was change the box and seem to blame herself for Belladonna's breach of etiquette. Had Lolly tried such a trick after she was three months old, she knew she'd find herself banished to the bathroom for an hour. And what was worse, the few times she tried to point out the discrepancy in the severity of punishment or in Myra's attitude toward the two, Myra dismissed her complaints with an airy *Noblesse oblige*.

Myra began to heap up the sand toward a tall spire for the castle.

"Did the youngest puppy have a name?" Lolly asked.

Myra seemed to consider a moment before answering while she worked on the peak of the spire. "I call her 'Sweetums,'" she said finally. "But that's only a pet name. Do you want to give her a real one?"

Lolly considered. She appreciated Myra's gesture in allowing her to contribute to the story, but she couldn't think of a better name. To cover her discomfort she tried a change of subject.

"Why are you so hard on me and so lenient with Belladonna? Don't you love me as much as her?" she asked. She hadn't really meant to say that at all, not ever. It was unthinkable that Myra didn't love Lolly at all, of course. But that nagging jealousy tormented her.

"Of course I love you," Myra said. "You know, I hadn't consciously thought about my mother in years till we were talking about babies a while ago. But I remember something she told me shortly before she died. I was jealous about the baby that was to be born soon and I was afraid she'd forget me or not love me as much when the new one came. She must have sensed the way I felt because she told me one day that every mother who has more than one child has one of them who is the secret child of her heart. And she said I was the one she loved the best of all. I believed her at the time, though for all I know now, she might have said the same thing to each of her girls. I've never had the nerve to ask my older sisters." She patted Lolly's flank with a sandy hand. "But you know when I'm telling the truth. And you're the child of my heart. Yes, I love Belladonna, too. She's a good enough cat, even if she's not unique. She's family. I don't see how anyone can live with another intelligent being and not either love her or hate her. But I expect more from you than from her because you're not a dumb animal and she is."

"Dumb, she is, yes, but not stupid!" Lolly blurted out. As she said it, she realized her own words were also true. Just as there were things that Lolly could do that Myra couldn't even though Myra was undeniably smarter than Lolly (and Lolly could just barely begin to grasp the magnitude of all the things she didn't know), so it came now to Lolly that Belladonna could do some things better than Lolly. Lolly couldn't climb trees at all, for instance. It would never have occurred to Lolly to examine the difference in the leaves on the palm trees if she hadn't seen Belladonna run up the sloping trunk of the palm to one of the broadleaf clusters that grew about two meters off the ground, far below the slender palm fronds and coconuts at the top. Belladonna used the notch the parasite formed on the trunk as a nest for a lookout tower. The giant leafy vine was related to the philodendrons that Myra cultivated as houseplants. Belladonna seemed equally at home with either the wild or domestic variety.

They weren't totally wild, either. Myra had explained that the idea for them had come from nature. Airborne seeds sometimes would attach in a rough place of the bark and flourish there.

"You can be pretty sure, though, if it looks artistically pleasing, chances are that it was originally cultivated by humans." Now some of the cultivated plants had died and were decaying, giving off ripe odors. Lolly thought she could distinguish which had been artificially placed. The prettiest were the ones that had been planted where nature might have placed them, nourished and protected by human intervention till they became firmly established, and then allowed to revert to nature when the camp had been abandoned.

Lolly's wandering thoughts came back to the sand castle, which was nearly finished now. Absorbed in building, Myra seemed to have forgotten Lolly's presence. She was nearly finished. Did the "castle" really look like a castle? Lolly wasn't too sure. She'd never seen a real castle, except in pictures. Her experience with castles was limited to illustrations for fairy tales, which she knew were not really true. She tried to compare the mounds of sand, neatly squared into towers and ramparts, courtyards and doors. It didn't really look very much like the pictures Lolly had seen. And yet, she could begin to see the resemblance; she almost could understand why this was called a castle. By tomorrow it wouldn't exist. The tide would wash it away as it brought in new pieces of coral, shell, mud, sand, and other debris from the sea. The beach was endlessly changing.

Something caught the corner of Lolly's eye.

A flash of blue.

"Look," she whispered.

"It's the Ulysses. It's wandered from its home on the mountain to visit us today."

Myra stood up and they watched it flutter nearby. The center of its wings were a brilliant, pure, deep ocean blue, the edges darker than coal. Together they watched it for almost a minute, neither speaking till it flew off, back towards the rain forest on the mountain where it belonged.

"Shall we go after it, Myra?"

"We couldn't catch up with it anyway. We can't fly. Hey, what do you think of our castle in the sand?"

Tomorrow they would fly home, but Lolly understood what Myra meant. "It's beautiful, Myra. It's my first one. But it's certainly the best castle I ever helped to make." They were both still chuckling at her feeble joke as they strolled slowly home, back through the forest, back to the "clearing" that was no longer quite clear.

When they got back to the cabin, Myra told Lolly to stay there while she waded out to the sandbar in the muddy flat that the low tide exposed. When she got back, Lolly watched as she prepared a large pot of water, brought it to a boil on the small stove, and tossed in the still wriggling lobster she had brought with her. When it was cooked to her satisfaction, she fixed dishes for Lolly and Belladonna and set them aside to cool, but she fixed nothing for herself.

"I've been invited to come over to the other side of the island for dinner tonight. There are some people I want to thank and say good-bye to. I know you don't want to go, so I'll leave you here to take care of Belladonna," she said. She didn't ask Lolly whether she wanted to go; she simply patted Lolly on the head and went before Lolly could think of anything else to say.

Myra hadn't thought to turn on the lights before she left, and the sun was setting. Lolly could operate the light switch at home. It was just a toggle on the wall. But the lamps here were a very old-fashioned kind that she couldn't manage without a true thumb. Soon it would be dark. Along the beach there would still be light from the moon and stars, but Lolly felt safer and more comfortable in the cabin.

Belladonna sat, dumb as ever, watching the sun go down. What did she think about being left? She could, if she wished, go roaming herself, just about anywhere on the island. Her eyesight was definitely better in the dark than Lolly's.

Lolly curled herself on Myra's bed. Of course Myra would return later. She had no doubts about that. But she was lonely now.

"Belladonna, come sleep with me." Would the cat come to her? Sometimes she came when Myra called her, sometimes not. The cat blinked, as if she was startled to be addressed by anyone other than her mistress. She tipped her head, then slowly walked toward the bed.

"Come on, Belladonna," Lolly encouraged. "Don't be afraid. I love you, too." She tried to make the clicking "K" sounds that Myra used to coax the cat. They didn't sound quite like Myra,

but Belladonna began to purr.

All at once she leapt on the bed. Diffidently she walked up to Lolly's head. The dog was at least ten times her size. Coolly she padded up to Lolly's head and touched noses. Then she curled herself into a confident ball next to Lolly's belly, like a baby. They slept together, waiting for tomorrow, when they would fly with the woman they both couldn't help loving.

-ABO-

Einstein's Cold Equation Blues

By David Lunde

It used to be so easy blasting into space: my home-built backyard rocket would take me anywhere.

The Stars My Destination, Non-Stop If I'd go until I made First Contact out in Scorpio.

At the thunder of my landing, Who Goes There? you would say (All You Zombies wondering how you got that way!)

I'd Skylark off to Vega cruising at Tau Zero and outsmart bug-eyed monsters, a More Than Human hero.

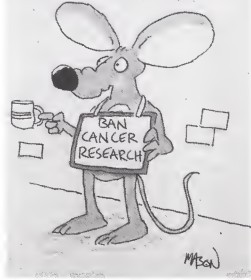
Out Around Far Rigel on a lazy day I'd roam, 'til I finally Lensed your message through stars like drifting foam:

The Lights In The Sky Are Stars but always Earth Abides Earthman Come Home, it's time to choose up sides.

No Runaround or Reason would keep me from my quest, as I put the best of mankind to every Alien test.

But the pianoforming soul of The Man Who Wanted Stars will never get what stars from the not-Barsoom of Mars,

for Einstein's Cold Equation, E equals MC squared, has caused our Childhood's End, and none of us is spared.



Quantum Leap

(Continued from page 24)

expected to be freezing in the middle of June.

"It's ready. Watch closely now, I'm gonna change the input."

The smooth waves on the oscilloscope scrambled for a second, then settled into a different sine pattern.

"Big deal," I muttered. "What do you expect?"

"Harry, don't be so damned impatient. That shift is what's supposed to happen. I just wanted you to see it before the weird one, so you'd have something to compare it to." Phil adjusted the controls. I was going to catch a cold. I just knew it.

"Okay. Now watch."

A typhoon hit the waves on the oscilloscope.

"See?" said Phil gleefully.

"That's weird. It must be picking up interference. The display's all broken up."

"Exactly. It can't keep up. My theory is..."

"Phil," I put a hand on his slim shoulder and looked deeply into his eyes. "Someplace warm, remember?"

"Oh, yeah," he nodded. "I've got some coffee waiting in the office."

"I hope you've got more than that. Let's go."

I took another swallow of the laced coffee, inhaled deeply on my first cigarette in an hour, and sighed.

"Thanks, Phil. I needed this."

"Do you have to smoke?" he gripped.

"Yes. I nearly froze to death in there. I've been warmer at the top of Mount Washington. What's the oscilloscope got to do with Speedy? I thought that's what you brought me here about."

"Speedy's circuits have got to be as near to absolute zero as we can get them or the superconductors don't work. You should know that, Harry."

"Yeah, that's fine for computers, but not people. Now what gives?"

Phil fidgeted. Things hadn't been going well for him. His wife left in March, taking their son to her parents' in California. Scuttlebutt had it the Japanese were nearly ready to announce a working supercomputer, and his firm's NSA grant was in jeopardy. If Maximus Research Company didn't deliver soon, Phil could be out of work. He looked like hell, twenty pounds slimmer, gaunt cheekbones prominent through his shaggy, straw-colored beard, and purple half-moons under his brown eyes.

"You saw what happened," Phil leaned forward. "Can you explain it?"

"Interference?" I guessed. "A loose connection somewhere? I don't know. You're the expert. You tell me."

"I will, or I'll give you my guess, anyway. But first, I want to make sure you can follow me. You know what we're trying to do here, right?"

"Of course. We're using superconductors and Josephson junctions for circuitry to build a supercomputer, faster than anything imagined before."

"Do you understand the theory behind it?"

"Quantum theory? Fantasy stuff. Like tunneling. Electrons appear to go from one point to another without crossing the space between, and they move a hell of a lot quicker than in a regular circuit. Same goes for superconductors. Somehow electrons zip through them like there was no resistance at all."

"It gets weird, Harry. You familiar with the Aspect and Clark experiments?"

"Uh, no."

"Aspect set up a delayed-choice experiment, one where light quanta get to decide whether they're a particle or a wave. Once he changed the conditions in the middle — and the quantum knew! Somehow the light particles knew the experiment had changed, even though they couldn't, and chose accordingly."

"Ah, Phil," I had to slow him down. He was starting to become irrational.

"I'm serious, Harry. Quantum theory allows for it. Clark did it one better. His team built a torus, or donut-shaped, superconductor which narrowed quite a bit at one point, looking for a shift in particle speed. He didn't get it. The whole thing behaved like a single big particle. When an electromagnetic field was applied at the narrow part, the rest of the ring changed states instan-

aneously. We're trying to adapt a variation of that in Speedy to leapfrog the Japanese."

"Phil, you've lost me. What's your point?"

"Okay. But you're going to have to trust me. As a sort of test circuit, we've created a variation of Clark's ring. Only we're able to impose a much broader spectrum of electromagnetic fields on it, even down to the wavelengths of subatomic particles, by tying into the lab's laser-plasma accelerator. The oscilloscope goes wacky when I impose the de Broglie wavelength of a neutrino onto the ring."

"A neutrino? They go through almost everything, don't they? That means you can't shield the ring from interference. Right?"

Phil had a smug smile on his face. "That's a reasonable guess, Harry. Only you're wrong. It's not interference, I think someone's modulating neutrino wavelengths and we're picking it up."

"Modulating?"

"Yeah, like modulating light in a communications laser, or modulating as in a particle-beam weapon."

"What's the matter with you, Mitchner? Where's that article you promised? You having any problems at home?"

"You've got to have a home to have problems there," I snapped, blasting Wollstein with my "you've-put-your-foot-in-the-cow-chip — mind-your-own-business" glare. Seen from over the rim of my glasses, Wollstein's face was a soft, almost amiable blur. It was the best he'd looked in years.

"Sorry. I forgot. Have you heard from Eileen recently?"

"When I fall behind in the alimony. The last time I saw her she was flanked by a couple of hungry amoebae calling themselves lawyers — and that was three years ago."

"And my article on supercomputers? When will I see that? I've got a Sunday magazine to fill. Remember?"

"Yeah, that's why I'm here. I've got a new angle, but I need more time."

"Time I haven't got. New angles I don't need. Copy. That's what I'll make me happy — 2,500 words worth."

"Please, Wollstein, trust me. It's big. So big, maybe I ought to give it to Desmond for the daily edition."

Wollstein glared, then shook his head in resignation. "All right. You've got two weeks. But it better be good, Harry. You come up dry, I've got a list of university physics files that need updating, in case we need them for orbits."

"Yuck. I'd rather be traded to the Boston Herald for a six-pack."

"That's a possibility, too. I want some copy from you by July 3. Got it?"

"Yeah. I'll deliver. I owed Wollstein. When my marriage underwent a meltdown and I tried dousing it with a couple of breweries, he'd been there. Desmond had fired me. (With cause — I couldn't really blame him.) But Wollstein had pulled new strings, kept me alive with an occasional feature assignment, and used his contacts to set me up as a free-lance tech writer. I do a computer or software manual every now and then and Wollstein fills in the gaps. At the moment, I needed this article as much as Wollstein. I'd promised my two boys I'd take them game fishing off the Florida Keys. I owed them. I hadn't seen them in a year thanks to Eileen's move south."

As much as I'd tried to convince him to meet me in a bar, Phil held out for a Burger King. He was halfway into his second Whopper when I arrived.

"Srrmmph," he said, waving at the seat opposite him. Mommies struggled with screechy toddlers, who spilled their soft drinks on nearby Formica table tops. I waited for Phil to swallow his latest mouthful.

"Any luck?" I asked before he could take another bite.

"Uh... Look at this." He slid a computer printout across the table.

No one was watching. The nearest mother was too busy wiping ketchup off her daughter's face while the child spat a half-entred french fry at her. There were nearly 85 sheets of fanfold paper filled with single-spaced lines of Xs and Os. I turned the pages sideways, but it didn't make any difference.

"Uh, Phil? What is this stuff? Some kind of binary code?"

He nodded taking a long pull at his shake. When he put the shake back on the table, a

strawberry-colored smile remained on his upper lip.

"Yeah. Someone's modulating neutrons and we picked it up. I think there's a pattern to it." A second smile appeared on his face.

"What does it mean? Is it a weapon?"

"Don't know." He popped an onion ring into his mouth. "But I'm gonna find out."

"You've got milkshake on your lip."

"Oh. Thanks." Phil ran a napkin across his mouth.

"I picked up the printout and shook it at him."

"Phil, Wollstein's getting on my case. There's no story in this. You said you had something."

"Don't you understand, Harry? It is a story. Someone is way ahead of us. Not only have they found a way to modulate neutrons, but they've got to have a working supercomputer to do it. Anything else'd be too slow."

"Who? The Japanese at Science City?"

"Dunno. Don't think so. The computer, maybe, but not the neutrons. They haven't got the facilities. Hell, we couldn't even find them until a few decades ago and only two or three accelerators are capable of generating them in any quantity. No, it's the Russians if it's anyone."

Phil leaned closer. "I wouldn't even have gotten this much if I hadn't snuck in after hours and used Speedy. And that's the only way I'm gonna figure out what's going on. It'd take forever on the mainframe."

"I don't think Wollstein will wait that long."

"Don't worry, Harry. I'm going to camp in over the holiday weekend if I have to. I'll have something for you some of mine."

"Wollstein won't wait that long, either." I took one of Phil's onion rings. Too much dough. I spat it out.

"I've got to have a story before that. Any ideas, Phil?"

"No. Sorry. I'm going as fast as I can. No one's allowed to use Speedy. It isn't fully operational yet. If the company weren't closed for the Fourth, it would take me at least a week or two. Uh, Harry?"

"Yeah?"

"I've got a problem."

"What is it?" I asked warily.

"My son. Fran's found a new boyfriend or something out in California and has taken off with him for a couple of weeks. She shipped the kid back to me. If I gotta spend the weekend in the lab, I gotta watch him myself."

I sighed. "Okay, Phil. Do the best you can. Call me as soon as you have anything. I need to get a drink."

"Here," Phil held out his half-finished milkshake, "have some of mine."

"Gok. No. Rather drink engine oil."

I woke out of a nightmare in which a horde of small children had tied me to a big oak tree, twenty feet off the ground, and were trying to hit me with small rockets that burst into dazzling sparks before my face. Each burst got a little closer and a little louder, setting off a ringing in my ears until one targeted me right between the eyes, jerking me awake. The phone lay on the floor, a squeaky voice chirping from the receiver. It sounded very far away. I picked it up.

"... get here."

"Mr. Mitchner isn't here right now," I said in a falsetto voice, peering at the digital clock. It was 3:45 in the morning. "If you tell me what dumb son of a rooster is calling at this hour, I'll have him return the call when he gets back."

"Harry? Phil? Get over here. The code. I need your help. Get over here right away."

"Phil? Do you know what time it is? Can't this wait until morning? I just got to sleep. Your damned son had me running in circles all night."

"No. Everyone will be back to work in the morning. I won't be able to get at Speedy. We gotta do it now, Harry. Get over here."

"All right. The sooner I get there, the sooner I can strangle you."

Phil looked like he hadn't slept or shaved or — I wrinkled my nose in distaste — bathed for days. I didn't matter. I could wash my hands later, after I choked the breath out of his skinny neck.

"Any last words, Phil? I spent the last three days hiding from Wollstein while I tried to keep your son, Paul, happy. You know what a little

(Continued to next page)

(Continued from previous page)

monster you've unleashed on the world? Do you? How many times can you walk through Old Ironsides? Or up the Bunker Hill monument? And the Museum of Science. You know what it's like trying to explain to a security guard that the little geek that nearly toppled the 45-foot dinosaur isn't your kid? That you're doing someone a favor? I didn't get to sleep until two hours before you called. I feel like I want to kill someone — and you're available."

"Where is Paul now, Harry?"

"My place. Sleeping. I should've strangled him." I closed my eyes. Brilliant fireworks from the Boston Pops Fourth of July celebration on the Esplanade still exploded against my eyelids. Paul had insisted I take him. Stupidly, I'd agreed. I hated crowds and the concert gave vast new meaning to the word.

"Don't be silly, Harry. He's just eight. Besides, I need your help. It should be just right. I don't think we can afford any mistakes. The consequences could be inconceivable." Phil stopped fiddling with the computer keyboard and looked at me. "Harry? Are you all right?"

"Yes. No." I opened my eyes again. "It doesn't matter. What have you figured out?"

"Don't you remember? The neutrinos? The binary code? It isn't the Russians. No way. You'll never guess who it is."

"You're right. I'm not gonna guess. Tell me. Who's it?"

"Aliens."

"An alien? What do ..."

"No, Harry. Aliens plural. That's why it's got to be just right."

"What's got to be just right?"

"Our first message."

"Message?"

"Of course! Don't you understand, Harry. They're talking to each other. Dozens of them. Light years apart, but talking to each other instantaneously. And one of them's here, Harry. That's how I was able to break the code. Look, Homer's *Odyssey*, broken down from the English translation and transmitted in a binary code. And then," Phil waved a thick printout in front of my face. "Hal Clement's *Neelander*."

"It's like our Clark ring, only much bigger. Like all these particles that come from the other in the original gigantic particle before the bang. Like they're in some kind of paired-spin arrangement. They behave like they're still in touch, still right beside each other."

"We've done it, Harry. We've tapped into the intergalactic long-distance line. AT&T's room and pop operation's nothing compared to this!" Phil's voice was filled with excitement.

"Aliens?" I said and sat down, the impact of that one word beginning to sink in. Then I thought of the little monster sleeping peacefully in my apartment and recalled how nice and cozy it had been to be alone.

And Phil wanted to cut into the line and say, "Hello."

"Phil? What if they aren't friendly? What if it's some kind of exclusive club? What if they can do more than talk long distances?"

"Anything's possible, Harry. Who knows? But somehow I don't think they'll be unfriendly. Not with that kind of advanced technology." He smiled wistfully.

"Oh, crap," I groaned. "Another dumb wild-eyed optimist. Phil." I waved my hand tiredly around the chilly room, "we've got the technology. How friendly are we? ICBM friendly? Germ-warfare friendly? C'mon, Phil, don't be naive. You say one of them is here, transmitting human literature. Maybe they're just collecting it all for a museum someplace, or a zoo, so they'll have a record of what we were like before they wipe us out. Maybe this alien's here to carve the Earth up into condo lots — you know what real estate agents are like."

"No way. You're paranoid, Harry. So what if we're not perfect? We're still here after more than forty years of living with the bomb. We aren't going to use it again, Harry. We might even grow out of it. And these aliens might help us. Suppose they have cheap energy. Methods of growing more food. Genetic engineering advanced enough to wipe out all of the illnesses that plague us. Suppose they've discovered immortality. Or faster-than-light travel. What then, Harry?"

"I don't know. Suppose we tap into the line and this alien on Earth tracks us down?"

"It can't. Its receiver's broken. I've translated enough to know that. It won't know we



Art by Courtney Skinner

broke the code. And the others are light years away."

"It's cut off — you're sure of that?"

"Yes. I've got it somewhere here in the translations. It's still sending, but it can't receive, something about a broken diode. It doesn't think much of humanity."

I sympathized with the alien. Its situation was a little like my marriage. I kept sending alimony and didn't receive anything in return. Eileen had moved to Florida, taking the two kids with her. I saw them once, twice a year at best. I thought of Phil's son sleeping in my apartment. How disappointed little Paul was by the way machine and how he'd climbed the three-story replica of a Tyrannosaurus Rex at the Museum of Science and scraped his knee. I'd never admit it to Phil — or Eileen — but I took some pleasure in treating his scrape and playing daddy. There were inconveniences and pains, too, mind you, I hadn't turned completely soft. But I thought of the emptiness of my apartment before Phil's son arrived and decided the hassles were better than being alone.

"What the hell," I said, feeling my wide-awake drunken best (I'd had more than fireworks the night before). "Why not? Let's give it a try." I knew just what message to send.

I sat down and laboriously scribbled on the back of a piece of computer printout, studiously ignoring Phil's pointed suggestions that I use the computer terminal. Eventually, after crossing out a few misfired sentences, I had it.

It only took a minute for Phil to program the message into Speedy. We both watched the oscilloscope with anticipation as he hit the transmit button.

The message zipped across the CRT: HELLO. LET US HELP FIND YOUR LOST SHEEP — SINCERELY, HARRY MITCHNER.

The screen went blank.

"Uh oh," Phil mumbled.

A minute passed, then the screen erupted, the phosphors dancing like a bunch of Russians loose in a vodka factory. Two seconds later it stopped.

The screen stayed blank.

"Uh oh." This time I said it.

"Let's see what they sent," Phil said, turning to Speedy's keyboard.

"You're an optimist. Why did the signal stop? Did we break something?"

"I don't think so," Phil said. "Look. They answered us."

I walked over and examined Speedy's monitor. There was one readable line. It said: LET US THINK ABOUT IT.

"Great. Did we screw up?"

"Harry, I think you got it wrong."

I looked over at the oscilloscope. Its screen was still blank. "You sure we didn't break something?"

"No. Trust me. You'll see."

I did trust him and he was right. The next few paragraphs the aliens transmitted were only a little harder to translate. The message became progressively more difficult to interpret.

But those few paragraphs were a kicker. A congratulations for getting that far and the opening set of instructions on how to use Speedy to build an even faster and more powerful computer, which could then be used to communicate with them on the correct frequency. It seems our signal was garbled and spread out across several bandwidths. The aliens didn't want us to transmit again until we had the right equipment. Before the aliens went off the air they made it clear we had to get in touch with their stranded colleague.

Three weeks later, Phil said just the little part he could translate at the beginning implied the new computer would be as far beyond Speedy as calculus was beyond simple addition. He had a suspicion that once the new machine was built, the rest of the message would tell us how to officially go on line with the aliens. I hoped he was right. But I still had reservations. For all we knew, the new computer could be some kind of Frankenstein monster, like Phil's son, Paul.

In any event, Phil had a project to keep him busy for the rest of his life and I had my story. Only Wollstein didn't see it that way.

"Are you out of your mind, Harry? Have you switched from booze to designer drugs?" He threw my manuscript down on his cluttered desk. "You call this a science article? I'll tell you what it is. It's garbage, that's what it is. Take it and get out of here and don't come back until you've sobered up."

He didn't even give me a kill fee. That meant I couldn't go to Florida to visit the kids unless I waited until after I wrote a more routine piece on Speedy. It also meant Phil and I couldn't contact the alien here on Earth. We figured once we published the article, it might see it and contact us. Phil said he had an idea, some friend of his who was into science fiction, but I didn't pay him much heed.

I thought of Phil, so caught up with Speedy I don't think he ever saw much of Paul. Then I considered the alien, stranded light years from his home, perhaps never able to speak with his own kind again. I thought of my own kids waiting with their empty fishing rods in Tampa. Waiting for a message from their dad. And me with no money for plane fare. The alien hadn't given up; it was still sending messages, hoping blindly someone out there would hear them.

The hell with it. I threw a handful of clothes and my shaving kit into a knapsack and headed for the door. I'd thumb to Florida and spend on the beach. Some kinds of alone weren't worth it.

-ABO-

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